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THE MONOMANIAC OF LOVE.

THE
MONOMANIAC OF LOVE.

*A STUDY IN
THE PATHOLOGY OF CHARACTER.*

"Religion and ethics, with their too inflexible dicta, have never sufficiently allowed for the pathology of character, a yet unstudied, weighty theme."

MISS HELEN ZIMMERN.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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PREFACE.

IN the light of modern scientific philosophy the

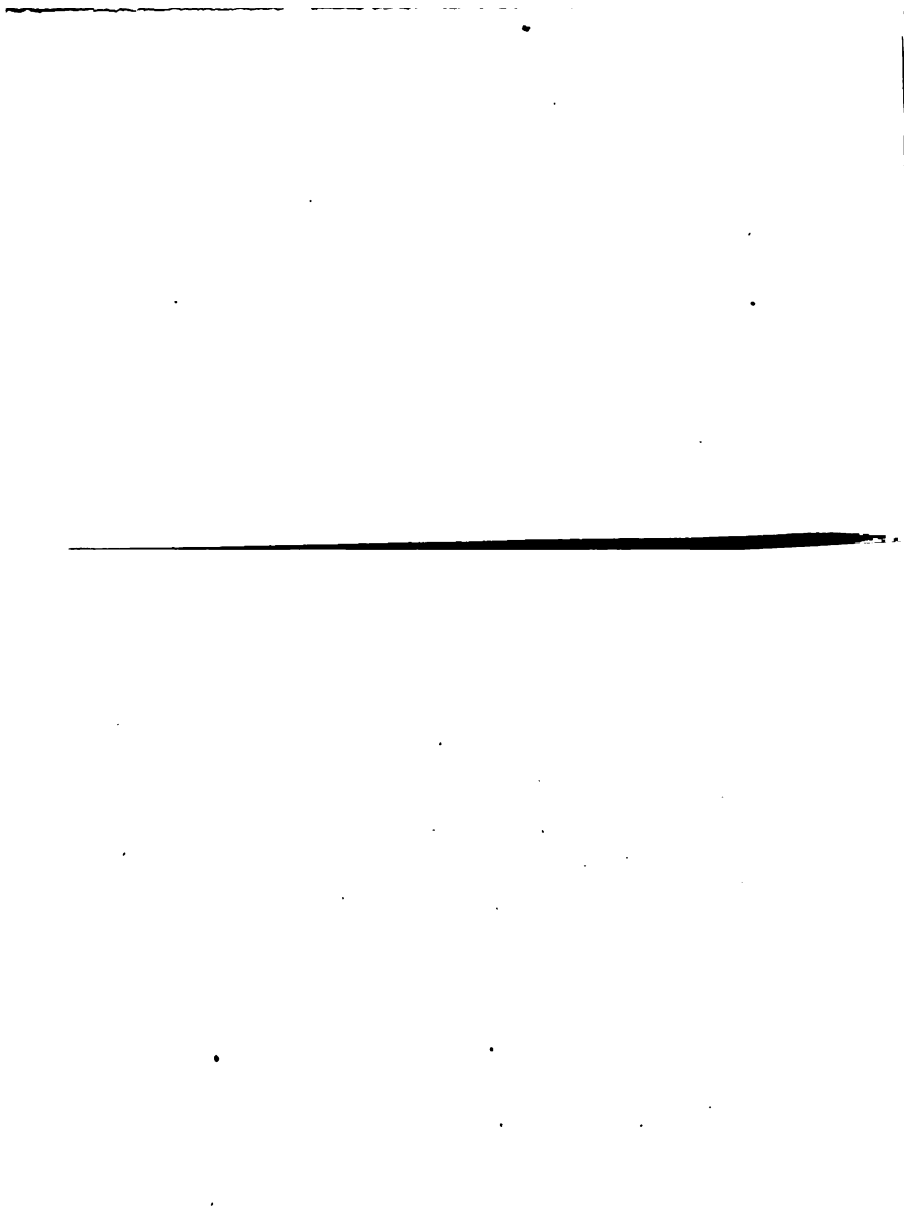
ERRATA.

Page 160, for "Rhoda" read "Rotha."

„ 176 „ „ fanatically" read "fantastically."

„ 275 „ „ fell" „ „ felt."

he has, therefore, sought in it to thoroughly morally vivisection such an individual. By morally vivisectioning him is not meant analytically describing his character, and giving summings-up, from time to time, of his conduct in general attributes—nothing so scientific as that. What is meant is simply placing him in a succession of carefully pre-arranged circumstances, and then not merely taking note of his actions, but



PREFACE.

IN the light of modern scientific philosophy the character of the individual man is seen as being, fundamentally, the cumulative result of the gradually evolved habits of his progenitors. It is discerned by minds imbued with that philosophy that *morally*, as well as physically, a unit of humanity is a development that has taken place under the tyranny of heredity. To take an imaginary moral victim, of some extreme form of this tyranny, and morally vivisect him, the author of the following work has thought would make a profoundly interesting study, and he has, therefore, sought in it to thoroughly morally vivisect such an individual. By morally vivisecting him is not meant analytically describing his character, and giving summings-up, from time to time, of his conduct in general attributes—nothing so scientific as that. What is meant is simply placing him in a succession of carefully pre-arranged circumstances, and then not merely taking note of his actions, but

also watching closely what goes on in his mind — minutely observing his states of consciousness, both under their emotional and thought-evolving aspects, so far as they have any palpable relation to the workings of his moral nature. He is not morally taken to pieces; but as a *whole*, endowed with conscious responsibility, he is exhibited under a variety of trying, *pecially-selected conditions* just as he feels, wills, and thinks.

The special human subject chosen by the author for moral vivisection from the various ones that presented themselves to his mind, is one that seemed to himself the most interesting amongst them. It is that of an individual in whose nature two strong inherited currents of antagonistic impulse meet in fierce conflict — a highly vicious current coming to him through his father, and a highly religious current through his mother. This ill-fated man plays the part of hero in the narrative about to be related.

To give full swing to the conflicting innate tendencies of such a victim of heredity, he manifestly should not be endowed with a strong will to interfere with their operations. He is accordingly represented, when the story begins, as being then afflicted with (not absolutely, but relatively, as compared with ordinary men) what Coleridge terms a “paralysis of volition.”

Now, a man displaying a miserable debility of will very decidedly announces that there exists in him a strong tendency to insanity. And various cruel experiences that the author's object makes it necessary for his hero to pass through, would, in a man of such unsound organisation as the latter is represented as having, necessarily produce such tossings to and fro, and foamings of spirit in him, that the shipwreck of his reason would be likely ultimately to result. This result the author causes actually to be brought about, and thus effectually saves his hero from otherwise necessarily having that uninteresting malady to which suffering personages in novels are so fearfully subject—brain fever.

To imaginatively pourtray madness at all successfully, is notoriously a difficult task ; but as the study of the character of the hero of the following work of fiction aims at being an exhaustive one, a serious attempt has been made to display the workings of his mind when in an insane condition.

According to the late Sir Henry Holland, one of the clearest indications that it is possible to have of a person having become insane, is his displaying an absolute inversion of his ordinary thoughts and feelings ; and this the author of "The Monomaniac of Love" has found it would best suit his purpose to make the prominent characteristic in the madness of

his hero. He is depicted, in that state, as showing as complete an inversion of his ordinary frame of mind as a boy standing on his head shows a complete inversion of the ordinary position of his bodily frame. Any one, however, familiarly acquainted with a boy so exhibiting himself upside-down, would have no difficulty in recognising him as the same individual that he knew as ordinarily standing on his feet. The author's imaginary victim of heredity become insane should manifestly, in like manner, be recognised by the reader as having the same individuality in his inverted as in his ordinary mental condition. The author has taken great pains to try and ensure that this shall be the case. He has endeavoured so to pourtray the various sane and insane states passed through by his hero, that whether he is represented as smitten down by overwhelming sorrow or lifted up by delirious joy—whether tossed to and fro on the waves of a dreary sea of doubt, or fanatically rushing straight forward, under the influence of delusions, towards a visionary end—whether ardently thirsting for ignoble, selfish pleasures, or madly aspiring to become enrolled amongst “the noble army of martyrs”—whether reflecting with melancholy pride that he is a being able to say “*I*,” or, having *the unity of his consciousness* so disordered that he is unable to recognise many of the thoughts

of his own mind as being his own, but conceives of them as the utterances of unseen personalities—yet that still, palpably, to the reader, an underlying, persistent unity of spirit shall be unvaryingly manifested by him. In following the evolution of his character, from the point where the story begins, interruptions in the continuity of the record will be found to occur; but these are simply resorted to to avoid wearying the reader, not with any design of having recourse to creative *fiats* with the curtain down. If all the represented stages in his hero's career are not recognisable as being plainly fragmentary sections of what, if the whole were seen, would be one unbroken line of evolution, then the author has signally failed in what he has attempted. To critically seek to discover whether he has really failed or whether he has succeeded, will possibly prove an amusement to readers fond of psychological studies.

But in laying bare, as it were, with a mental vivisectioning knife, the inmost nature of the "cracked" human being that he has selected for experimentation, the author of "The Monomaniac of Love" aims at something higher than merely giving amusement—he aims at helping to promote, at least to some slight extent, the grave interests of truth.

No explanatory remarks are needed here in regard to the subordinate characters that play parts in the

novel. A pathological study of their moral natures is not the object of the work, and so there is but very little peeping into any of their brains and hearts, to curiously watch their intellectual and emotional workings. It is only as useful satellites, revolving round the central character to reflect light upon him, that the subordinate characters are taken notice of.

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CHAPTER I.

THE CURFEW BELL.

"ARTHUR, my dear," said Mrs. Howard in a feeble voice to her only son, as he sat by her bedside on the afternoon of Christmas Day, 187—, "get my bunch of keys out of my work-basket, and, with the largest key, open the top left-hand drawer of the chest of drawers—you will find there my gold locket: take it out and give it me."

Arthur—a very emaciated-looking young man of middling height, whose sallow face had its lower half concealed by a dark beard that gave increased expression to his profoundly melancholy eyes—got up as noiselessly as possible, went to the drawer indicated, took out a little morocco box, and from this an oval-shaped gold locket. Returning to the side of the bed, he was about to place the locket in his mother's hand, when she requested him to open it for her. He did so, and gave it to her, and she then contemplated its contents in silence, her face assuming an expression of loving sadness.

The locket contained a beautifully executed miniature portrait, painted on ivory, of the worthless husband of the sufferer (her first and only love), by whom she had been basely forsaken on Christmas night just thirty years ago. Forsaken, too, by him not because she had committed any fault, but simply because she was too good for him. For she was a woman of pure mind and saintly life, and he one of those men who seem as if possessed by unclean spirits—a hog-like soul that knew no higher joy than wallowing in the mire of sensuality. Loving him devotedly, she had married him with the romantically religious purpose of reforming him and saving him from moral perdition. She had believed that if he had a *home* and a smiling, loving wife to come to after his daily business in the City was over, that then the sweet taste of joys smiled upon by conscience would soon cure him of all fondness for vicious indulgence. For, she reflected, before her marriage, in excuse for his wildness as a bachelor, he had when quite young lost both his father and mother, and he had no sister—no woman who was near and dear to care for him—was unblessed by any domestic restraints to impose limits to the wild play of passion in his hours of leisure. And as he manifestly possessed a nature thirsting ardently after pleasure, was it not almost inevitable, she asked herself, that such

a man a twenty-one years of age, after having been for some time exposed to the Protean forms of temptation of wicked London, would be found whirling in the vortex of dissipation? Providence, however, had, it seemed to her, assigned her as her happy mission the task of calming the tempestuous waves of his unruly passions by pouring upon them the heavenly oil of virtuous love. Thus brightly dreaming, she at length responded to his wooing with a blushing "yes," and bringing with her "airs from heaven," became his bride.

But though her romantically religious belief that she was a chosen instrument in the hands of Providence, destined to transform her sensualist husband into a saint, proved to be a cruel delusion, yet some rays of heavenly light were reflected by her own pure spirit into the dark, bottomless pit of his foul soul, so as to light it up sufficiently for him to see its hideousness. The spectacle had filled him with loathing. His delight in mere sensual pleasures was temporarily taken from him, but the miserable man found himself utterly incapable of delighting at all in any pleasures of a higher order. To enjoy those things which he was, naturally, only fit to enjoy, it was necessary for him to shut out the celestial light that showed their vileness, but that his angel-wife would not suffer him to do. A woman that is an angel

when married to a man that is a devil cannot help tormenting him. She yearns and strives to make him good, and hence necessarily does cruel violence to the devilish nature. The slave of his fleshly appetites, from regarding and speaking of his severely virtuous wife as a "beastly nuisance to him," he at length got to actually detest her, and most intensely so when, at her father's death, she came into much less money than he had expected; for he was as sordid as he was sensual, and had married her merely as a financial speculation, believing her father to be much richer than he actually was. Soon after this disappointment the worthless husband decided to abandon his wife, and though he had good prospects of advancement in the bill-discounting firm in which he was engaged in the City, to throw up his situation there, and to emigrate with a paramour, taking with him all the money that he had at his command. Having made all his preparations, he, on the Christmas night already spoken of, upon returning home with his wife from a family dinner-party, went out by himself, under the pretence of taking a saunter and smoking a cigar, and never came back again.

The next morning his wife received from him a heartless letter, saying that incompatibility of temper made it impossible for them to live happily together, and he advised her, therefore, to go and keep house

for her bachelor brother (her only living near relation), who he felt sure would be very glad to have her. In reference to himself, he told her he was going abroad immediately, and that she was not to expect ever to hear from, or to see, him again. And she never did.

Soon after his departure the deserted wife went to live with her bachelor brother, and remained with him until, after many years, he died. But she had always lived in hope that one day her husband would return to her. Neither the effacing hand of time nor the arrival of many sorrows and anxieties could eradicate this hope. She had always had a cheering feeling, which she regarded as prophetic, that when her dissolute husband had drained the cup of sensual pleasure to the dregs, and had ruined his health, Providence would lead him to return to her, to be nursed by her, and to die repentant in her arms. But it had been a great trouble to her that of the irrepressible love that, unchanged by the lapse of time, inspired this hope, she had not dared to speak for many years before his death to her matter-of-fact brother—it quite enraged him to hear her do so. The last time that—a long while after her husband's desertion—she had said anything to her brother on the subject, he snubbed her for doing so in a way that deeply wounded her sensitive feelings. "Theresa,"

he then said, "after you have been abandoned by your husband all these years, it must be clear to you that his leaving you was no act done in a fit of mad passion, was no mere consequence of some temporary adulterous infatuation for another woman, but was an act of deliberate villainy. It exasperates me, then, to hear you say that you can still love such a scoundrel; you show yourself to be more than stupid by doing so; you exhibit yourself as a very monomaniac of love."

These humiliating words Theresa had never forgotten. That that fidelity of love in which her heart gloried should to her brother appear mere imbecility, to be deplored, distressed her cruelly. And the more so that she feared her unsentimental brother had brought her dear Arthur—her only child—to the same way of thinking; and so she had shrunk of late years even from speaking to him of the Arthur that she had lost but still loved so well.

The thought that her dear son, standing by her bedside, might be compassionately regarding her as "a very monomaniac of love," was disturbingly present to her mind as she lay, that Christmas afternoon with which this narrative opens, contemplating the miniature of her husband with weeping eyes. For "monomaniac" is a word of very ugly sound. Unhappily, too, what she thought her son

might be mentally doing he *was* doing. His mother's irrepressible love for her vile husband, Arthur considered, had been correctly labelled by his late uncle "monomania." That being so, it only remained for him, he thought, to deplore the existence of the moral disease, and to pity his poor mother who was afflicted with it. And yet if Providence, at that moment, had permitted some angelic intelligence to enlighten his mind, would not its teaching most probably have been much such as is expressed in words like these?—

"Supposing your mother's irrepressible love for an unworthy husband has been correctly labelled by her late brother, is that love, therefore, a thing to be deplored? Cannot, then, abnormal manifestations of feeling, that show in the individual an absence of ordinary discriminating intelligence—cannot monomania, because it is disease, yet be a cause of that which is divinely beautiful? Is it not through the proverbially *stupid* oyster suffering *disease* that we get the jewel that, of all jewels, is the most perfect in form, the softly outlined, gently radiant, pearl? The pearl-like drops now rolling, for her lost love, down your gentle mother's face, are such as might be shed over a frail human victim of sin by one of those pure 'monomaniacs of love,' the seraphim that exist but to adore Him who is Love."

After she had continued to regard the miniature portrait of her husband for a considerable time in silence, the suffering woman gave back the gold locket to her son, saying—

“Take it from my hand, Arthur, and keep it in remembrance of me when I am dead.”

“Perhaps,” he gently objected, “you may yet want it, my dear mother, to wear yourself.”

“Never—never more,” she answered, in tones of mournful resignation.

At these words Arthur wept bitterly, and presently, trying to speak, convulsive sobs choked his utterance.

“I am sorry to leave you, my dear boy,” gently murmured his mother, “but it is God’s will that we must part, and it is no doubt for the best.” And then, after a pause, when she saw him more composed, and looking at him steadfastly with her soft grey eyes, she added, “Arthur, I have something very particular to say to you.”

“What is it, dear mother?”

Before she had time to reply, their conversation was interrupted by the nurse entering with some beef-tea.

“By-and-by, when we are alone together, I will say what it is,” whispered the poor sufferer.

The nurse, meanwhile, arranging the pillows at her back, Arthur assisted his mother to sit up in bed, in

order that she might try and take a little of the beef-tea. In doing so he clumsily touched her bosom, the seat of her malady. Acute pain wrung from her a scream that pierced her son's heart, the more so as immediately after she looked at him reproachfully, saying at the same time, "How cruel of you not to be more careful!" She then sat for some few moments with compressed lips, heavily contracted brows, and dilated, quivering nostrils, bearing witness how intense was the physical pain that she suffered. But when she saw the extreme mental distress that these too eloquent expressions of her bodily torture caused her son, she endeavoured to suppress them, and with both eyes and lips pathetically struggled to smile forgiveness.

At sight of this a desolating sense of the infinite loss of affection he was about to sustain took possession of her son, and he again wept passionately.

After the invalid had taken a little of the beef-tea, the nurse fetched the landlady (Arthur and his mother were living in furnished lodgings), to help her get the patient up, that her bed might be made comfortable. Arthur had then to leave his mother's room for a while, and, as he had been indoors all day and was suffering from headache, he availed himself of the opportunity to take a little exercise in the open air.

The house where he lived was in Gloucester Street, a short distance from the Gloucester Gate of the Regent's Park, so he went in that park for a walk. After strolling aimlessly about near the Zoological Gardens for about a quarter of an hour, he found himself opposite the "Ready-money" drinking fountain in the Broad Walk. There he stopped, hesitating for some little time whether he should go on farther down the walk or turn and go up Primrose Hill. Such was the miserable debility of will from which he suffered, that he felt distressed at being called upon by himself to decide upon a small matter like this. Why he should feel any painful indecision at all about going on or turning back, he did not know, but still he *did* feel it—there was no doubt about that disagreeable fact.

Sleepless nights passed at his mother's bedside, and the constant presence of hopeless sorrow, had disastrously impaired his naturally feeble nervous system. Unhappily, too, the immoderate use of stimulants (they temporarily relieved his miserable sensations) was partly a cause of his nervous disorder.

As he stood, unable to will what he should do next, he did not notice that another promenader in the Broad Walk was nodding to him familiarly, and walking quickly towards him. Yet this promenader was a rather conspicuous object, for he had on a

“loud” check-pattern Ulster overcoat, a sailor’s-knot necktie of magenta-coloured satin, and a brown billy-cock hat. But the bull’s-eye lantern of Arthur’s consciousness was just then turned inwards upon himself. He turned it, however, upon the wearer of the check-pattern Ulster overcoat, magenta necktie, and billy-cock hat, when he was aroused by those articles being brought and stationed within a few inches of his nose. He then recognised before him a young man who was a distant relation of his, and also one of the clerks engaged at the same office as himself—that of Messrs. Hammer, Strike, and Slaughter, Auctioneers and Estate Agents, Piccadilly.

“Is that you, Andrews?” he said to his fellow-clerk. “I did not notice you before. Why didn’t you speak?”

“I was waiting to see how long it would be before you’d recognise me,” said Andrews, laughing. “I shouldn’t have thought *it* would have made so much difference in me.”

“What is the ‘it’ that makes so much difference in you?”

“Why, don’t you see a difference *here*?” said Andrews, pointing to his chin. “I had hair here, besides a moustache and whiskers, when you saw me at the office yesterday, had I not?”

“Ah! I see now—you have shaved your chin. You

want the nursemaids in the parks to take you for a military man, I suppose ? ”

“ Well, I *am* a full private in the Primrose Hill Volunteers, you know,” rejoined Andrews, jokingly. Immediately afterwards becoming serious, he said, “ How is your poor mother to-day ? ”

“ Thank you, she slept several hours last night, and, on the whole, has suffered less pain than usual to-day.”

“ I am glad to hear it; but you look dreadfully unwell yourself just at present.”

“ And I feel so too.”

“ No doubt,” said Andrews, sympathetically. “ It’s a great trial for a fellow to see his mother suffer, as yours has done for some time, and to be unable to do anything to relieve her; but you’ll only add to her sufferings if you fall ill yourself, so you must try and pull yourself together a bit for her sake. Come and have a little talk with me at my lodgings, and I’ll give you a good stiff glass of brandy-and-water—that’ll put a little life into you.”

“ Thanks,” said Arthur. “ The daylight is going already, and there’s a nasty mist coming on; there’s no longer any pleasure in walking unless one wants to go somewhere. I shall be glad to do as you ask me, upon the understanding that you don’t expect me to stay with you for the evening. I must be back

home soon after six. I have to keep watch by my poor mother's bedside while the nurse gets a few hours' rest."

"Well, you can keep me company till about a quarter to six, and that will just suit me beautifully. I sha'n't want any one to do so any longer. I'm going to spend the evening with Dubois."

So saying, Andrews took Arthur's arm, and the two friends walked off together.

"Ah! by the way," rejoined Arthur, "didn't you tell me yesterday, at the office, that you were going to dine with him and his family at two to-day? How is it that you have not gone?"

"Because last evening Dubois called on me to let me know that my sister was confined with twins yesterday, and that, of course, the proposed Christmas dinner-party would not take place."

"I hope Mrs. Dubois is doing as well as can be expected?"

"Oh! she's doing wonderfully well, thank you."

"Why, it isn't quite a year that she had twins before, is it?"

"Not quite a year; she takes after my mother in that way, as in many others. My mother had eighteen, you know."

"Eighteen twins!"

"No, no; I of course meant to say children."

"It's a bad look-out," added Arthur, "for a poor professor of French and mathematics like him, only just struggling on, to have a wife that promises to bring him a terribly large family."

"Yes; but I think that he will get on very well in time. That little book of his, 'English French and French French Compared,' has proved a great success. He tells me that it has brought him several very good pupils."

"I'm very glad to hear it. When you see him this evening, congratulate him for me on the success of his book, and condole with him about the twins. Twins twice within two years! Great heavens!"

"You seem astonished at that, as if it was something very wonderful!" exclaimed Andrews. "But my landlady, when I told her this morning, didn't appear to think it so *very* extraordinary; and as for her little daughter that she had by the hand, she seemed to think my news as nothing to what she could tell me. 'Mitter Andoo,' she eagerly and proudly said, 'Mitter Andoo, ouwer tat has tittens everwy Fiday.'"

"You ought to let Mr. Darwin know about that cat," said Arthur, with sham philosophical gravity. "Have you noticed, yourself, anything very peculiar about the animal?"

"Nothing, except a particular way she has of winking when you look her in the face."

"To commonplace people such as we are," said Arthur, hesitatingly, as if reflecting, "there doesn't perhaps seem anything very remarkable in that; but I need hardly point out to *you* (the word *you* strongly emphasised) that our great naturalist might be able to deduce from it conclusions as to the very human-like knowingness of the feline intellect of a very momentous kind—so great is the difference between mere common sense and genius! But it is quite unnecessary for me to remind *you* how remarkably this dissimilarity is shown in the writings of Mr. Darwin."

"It would be a good job if you bothered your brains a little less about Mr. Darwin and his theories," rejoined Andrews, seeing that Arthur was indulging in mocking chaff on account of his (Andrews) ignorance of Mr. Darwin's writings.

"I don't exactly bother my brains in the matter," said Arthur; "but can a reflective mind help deploring that man should have turned out such a palpable discredit to his unsophisticated ancestors?"

"I say, that *was* a pretty girl that just passed; did you notice her?" said Andrews, taking no notice of his friend's question.

"No," answered Arthur, in a tone of studied mournfulness.

"It's my opinion, Howard," said Andrews, a little

out of patience from his friend's affectation, "that you don't know a pretty girl from an ugly one."

"And a precious good job too," answered Arthur, sharply. "If it hadn't been for Dubois perceiving your sister to be pretty he wouldn't have married her, and then I shouldn't have been horrified at hearing of a friend of mine aggravating the evils of over-population by yearly adding to it two little lumps of human misery. Why, only six months before his marriage Dubois avowed himself to me to be a very decided disciple of Malthus!"

"But being a disciple of Malthus is no protection against falling in love; and when a man's once in love, what does he care about Malthus? He's like a man bewitched."

"That's no doubt a fact, and it's a very humiliating one. Seeing that poor human nature is so constituted, it is really a complete farce to call man a *reasonable* animal; he is but a *reasoning* animal. I mean he can reason so as to come to right conclusions, but resistless impulse impels him to set these at defiance in practice. The episode of human life in Nature looks to me like a cynical extravaganza, being enacted to amuse a Mephistophelean audience that is invisible. I seem to *feel* that mocking demons are staring and grinning at me."

"Go it," said Andrews; "you're very amusing in the mock-tragic line of business."

"Go it!" echoed Arthur; "yes, I feel just in the humour to go it in that fashion to-day. I curse, with the intensest bitterness of which an embittered nature is capable, the wretched fate that has doomed me to play the part of a gibbering phantasm in the ghastly phantasmagoria of human life. Why should we be forced to live in this howling wilderness of a world, without any option being given us as to whether we are disposed to do so or not?"

"What's the good of us troubling ourselves to ask such a useless question? *Here we are.*"

Arthur was somewhat taken aback by this reply; it had not occurred to him to look at the subject from that point of view. He felt like a boy playing leap-frog, who having challenged another to give him "a back," has one given him that it does not seem possible to him to leap over. But when he found himself fixed in a corner by a practical answer to any fantastic proposition of his, he had a habit of trying to wriggle out of it by travestying Teufelsdröschk. After a pause he resorted to that plan on the present occasion.

"*'Here we are'*—that is no doubt quite a sufficient reply for all animals that cannot say 'I;' but of a self-conscious individuality that does not occupy space, such as I feel that which essentially constitutes *myself* to be, how can you make such an asser-

tion? What has that which constitutes the essence of human personality to do with *here* and *there*, seeing it has no extension? How, then, can you say of any particular spot of this 'vague-menacing, storming-in,' bullying, brutal universe of matter, '*here* we are'? In bewilderment I ask you in reply, slightly altering the words of Teufelsdrösch, '*but where* are we'?" And Arthur elevated his eyebrows and looked at his friend as if he was simply astounded at the audacity of his assertion.

"As I don't go in for metaphysics I sha'n't attempt to give you an answer," said Andrews, laughing. "But you remind me of something that, as I was going to a friend's at Islington last night, was said to me by the driver of the 'bus outside which I rode. He had once, it appeared, driven a country stage-coach, and he, of course, would have it, in a knock-me-down argument that we had on the subject, that travelling by stage-coach was infinitely better than doing so by railway. 'I put it to you, sir, this way,' he said finally: 'if anything happens to you in a coach, *there* you are; but in a railway accident, where are yer?'"

"Where are yer, indeed!" exclaimed Arthur. "And what an excellent figurative representation of human life as a whole a bad railway accident supplies! The frightful accident of man and his misery

is the result of the express Time having run off the line and fallen into Space."

By this time the two friends had arrived at the house at Haverstock Hill where Andrews lived. And a very short time after they were sitting by the fire in Andrews's sitting-room, regaling themselves with brandy-and-water, and talking about things in general. They thus continued to occupy themselves until about a quarter to six o'clock. Arthur then told his companion that he must go, and Andrews also decided that it was time for him to start for Gray's Inn Road, where his brother-in-law lived. The two friends walked together as far as Park Street, Camden Town; there they parted, Andrews to get a King's Cross omnibus from the Camden Railway Station, and Arthur to walk up Park Street, and so into Gloucester Street.

But on arriving in Gloucester Street, instead of keeping on until he came to the house where he lived, he turned up Delancey Street. A mad craving within him for more drink than the three glasses of brandy-and-water that he had taken at his friend's, had now become uncontrollable. Uncontrollable, because (it being now past six o'clock) the spectacle of several public-houses lit up most brilliantly, and with doors invitingly a little way open, had temptingly met his eyes as he passed along, and fanned the

flame of his desire. Uncontrollable, because the alcohol that he had already drunk had paralysed his previously most miserably feeble will. Uncontrollable, because he was cursed with one of those wretched organisations in which the morbid craving for drink is an inherited disease—a transmitted *unnatural* instinct. For his father rarely ever went to bed sober, and his father's father died of *delirium tremens*. Cruel Nature had, in his case, visited the sin of his fathers upon the child.

Going for about fifty yards up Delancey Street, he repaired to a public-house, known as the Curfew Bell, to one of the private bars of which he paid a visit almost every evening. His fancy for whatever was odd, or in any way unusual, had led him to make this tavern a favourite haunt. It was built entirely in the modern-mediæval style of architecture. The same style was rigidly adhered to in its interior fittings; even the ornamental gas-branches were such that one would rather expect to see in a Ritualistic church than in a drinking-shop. Here he was in the habit of having spirits and other drinks on credit, and paying small sums of money on account as convenient. Latterly the great expenses attending his mother's illness had made him often short of ready money. This had caused him to be sufficiently remiss in his payments to excite the displeasure, not of the

landlord, who was an easy-going man, but of his wife, who "wore the breeches." This lady's physical structure, like the modern mediævalism around her, was remarkable for its hard angularity, and she had a temper to correspond. Remarking her scowl at him as he was drinking a glass of brandy-and-water that he had been served with by her husband, Arthur feared something unpleasant was brewing about his unpaid score there. To avoid having an altercation with the displeased landlady, he seized an opportunity, when she was occupied mixing some port-negus for a customer, in the private bar at the other end of the counter, to lay a sovereign before the landlord, and to request him to return fifteen shillings change, and to keep five in part-payment of what he owed.

"I'm afraid Mrs. Clapper won't like you paying so little," said the landlord, laying down fifteen shillings hesitatingly on the counter and looking towards his wife.

"*How* much change does he want?" asked Mrs. Clapper, in astonished indignation. At the same moment she sprang to her husband's side—sent him to finish making the port-negus, and clapped her hand on the fifteen shillings.

Arthur, being excited by drink, tried to push her hand away in a sufficiently rough manner to hurt

her. Very angry at this, she took her hand away, and said with a threatening look, "We must send in our account to your mother, then; no doubt she'll see us paid." Much alarmed, Arthur told Mrs. Clapper to keep the whole of the change.

This reference to his mother turned his thoughts strongly towards home, and made him anxious as to what might have happened there since he left; so he returned there at once.

Upon softly entering the sick chamber he found his mother asleep. The nurse, having put all in order, left him to go to bed herself for an hour or two in another room, as Arthur had arranged that she should do before he went out. He remained to watch over his mother. But he soon found himself becoming less and less fit for the task. The warmth of the room, in which a large fire was burning, made him feel increasingly more intoxicated than he had done out of doors. At length the inclination to fall into a drunken slumber grew irresistible. Filled with alarm at the thought that his mother might awake and find him in a state of sottish insensibility, instead of waiting ready to minister to her wants, he at last resolved to fetch the nurse, who was in the back room on the floor below. But on standing up his brain reeled, and after he had staggered forward one or two paces, he would have

fallen had he not saved himself by grasping the foot-end of the bedstead. In so doing he shook the bedstead, so as to slightly disturb the sleep of his mother. She moved restlessly and murmured, as if dreaming—

“My poor boy!”

For some minutes he remained holding on by the bedstead, carefully avoiding to make the least movement, and anxiously watching his mother. Then when she again seemed to sleep quietly he managed, without making much noise, to regain the easy-chair that he had quitted, feeling himself quite unable to carry out his intention of fetching back the nurse. Nor could he summon any one by the bell, for he had himself, unfortunately, accidentally broken the wire of it that morning.

In the easy-chair he quickly fell asleep, and while thus sleeping had a distressing dream. He dreamed of his disagreement with Mrs. Clapper at the Curfew Bell; but when she put down her hand on the change, on the bar-counter, he thought he succeeded in forcing it away, and that he flung it to some distance from the money, exclaiming, “D——n you, take your hand away, will you!” His violence wrung from her a cry of pain. She darted at him a revengeful look, and he felt again that sickening fear that the threat of the past evening had inspired him with.

At the same time he heard the voice of his mother, outside, calling out, "Arthur! Arthur! Arthur!" the third time in a tone of feebleness and anguish that wrung his heart. As he ran to the door a moaning sound, dying away as if from becoming more and more distant, fell upon his ears, and as he was about to go out he awoke.

On opening his eyes his first feeling was one of simple perplexity as to where he was; but on this giving place to a twilight glimmering of perception, there came a shadowy foreboding that the full light of consciousness would bring to him the revelation of a catastrophe. The comparative darkness of the room served to protract the painful confusion of his mind. That the weak eyes of his mother might not be inconvenienced, should she open them, only a night-light was burning in the room, placed on a table immediately behind the footboard of the mahogany French bedstead, which thus answered the same purpose as the shades to the footlights at a theatre. At the moment he awoke, from some imperfection of the wick or other cause, the night-light was burning in an almost expiring manner. The fire, too, had gone out. Even that part of the room that was beyond the footboard of the bedstead was as dimly lighted as is the stage when the footlights are lowered, nearly to extinction, for the per-

formance of some act of nocturnal villainy. Owing to this obscurity it was with difficulty, and only after the lapse of some little time, that he was able, even dimly, to recognise any familiar objects. On his succeeding in doing this he was soon brought to a consciousness of his situation.

But the end of the room where he sat being in deep shadow, he was unable to discern whether any visible change had taken place in the state of his sick mother. Leaning towards the head of the bed, he listened anxiously, but could hear no sounds of breathing. This, however, he tried to hope, might be attributed to the noise made by a cab then passing along the street, and to the boisterous singing of a popular drinking-song by its apparently tipsy occupant. And it seemed to Arthur as if, purposely to give this vexatious noise a mocking character, Fate willed that just as the cab was passing nearest under the window of the room in which he sat, the following words, forming part of the chorus of the song, should be shouted out:—

“ For to-night we’ll merry be,
For to-night we’ll merry be,
For to-night we’ll merry be,
And to-morrow we’ll get sober.”

But the noise made by the cab, and by the *Christian* in it returning home from commemorating the birth

of Jesus, *drunk*, soon dying away in the distance—for the cab was going at a rapid pace—Arthur held his breath and listened with more intense attention than before. The ticking of his mother's watch on the chest of drawers was the only sound that broke the awful stillness of the room. He ran in agitation to the table at the foot of the bed, and, catching up the night-light, he, in his anxiety, moved with it too quickly towards the head of the bed: the current of air extinguished it and left him in total darkness. Fumbling about for the lucifer matches, he happened to knock down a chair, which, in the stillness of the night, seemed to make a great noise. This not being followed by any rustling of the bedclothes or any other evidence of his mother being awake, his heart sank within him as he thought what must be the nature of that sleep that remained unbroken by so loud a noise. At length he succeeded in lighting a candle, and, approaching close to his mother's pillow, withdrew the hand with which he had protected the feeble flame of the, as yet, imperfectly ignited wick. The trembling light fell upon a dead face, whose expression was a terrible record left by the departed spirit that it had fled in anguish. His unhappy mother had managed to drag herself to the edge of the bed, and was lying on her left side with her face towards, and her sightless eyes staring at, the easy-

chair in which he had been sitting. Her right arm was outside the bedclothes, and extended in a direction backwards, as if she had thrown it from her, and between the thumb and forefinger she held a small piece of some dark material. This, on bending down over her, Arthur perceived with surprise to be one finger of a kid glove. Inquiringly and in terror he glanced at his own right hand, and saw that a finger-stall that he had been wearing to protect an injured finger was gone ! It had been torn away at the stitches from the tape-strings to which it had been attached, the latter of which still remained tied around his wrist. The whole of the shocking truth then flashed upon his mind. The cry of pain and the voice calling out his name that he had just heard were not the fantasies of a dream ; the hand that, in struggling to grasp his, he had brutally repulsed with an oath, was *the hand of his dying mother !*

CHAPTER II.

REMORSE AND MELANCHOLIA.

“WHAT could it be that my poor mother was about to say to me at the moment she was interrupted by the nurse entering her room?” Such, during the many months of intolerable mental anguish that followed his mother’s death, was the tormentingly perplexing question incessantly suggesting itself to Arthur’s mind. With little chance, though, of eliciting from it any satisfactory answer; for his reasoning powers, being totally submerged by an overwhelming deluge of remorseful feeling, had no fair opportunity of exerting themselves. Self-torturingly and despairingly he repeated to himself again and again those words of his mother’s, “By-and-by when we are alone together I will say what it is.” How he hated himself at such times for his drunken slumber! How often at its remembrance he hid his face in his hands for very shame, even when alone in his chamber! The wasted hand that in the chill of waning life he should have warmed and cherished in his own, lying lifeless on the bed just as he had flung it from him, the dead

face with its sightless stare at the easy-chair in which he had sat in drunken sleep, were ever before him, threatening to be a source of never-ending horror and remorse. The accursed drink, that had caused him to play so villainous a part at his mother's tragic death, he now regarded with intensest loathing, and since that fatal Christmas Day nothing stronger than water was suffered to pass his lips. But though freed from the poison of alcohol, his debilitated brain and nerves were quite unequal to the intense mental strain put upon them, and at length their greatly disordered condition manifested itself, notwithstanding his previous speculative opinions, under the form of religious melancholia.

“Notwithstanding his previous speculative opinions”—for before his attack of melancholia, Arthur, like so many other young men of the present day, was a doubter in matters of religion—he had thought that probably orthodox Christian teaching contained more or less of truth, but that the truth was so thoroughly mixed up with more or less of error, that to distinguish clearly the truth from the error was a hopeless task. But he was quite unable to go further than this, and, ceasing to trouble himself about religion, to boldly embrace that scientific materialism that it is proposed, by distinguished modern philosophers, should be accepted as a substitute for Christianity

His exact attitude of mind towards scientific materialism may, perhaps, be best depicted by giving here some small portion of a conversation that he had with his friend M. Dubois a few months before poor Mrs. Howard was laid up. M. Dubois had been seeking to persuade Arthur that it was a waste of intellectual power for him to worry himself so much as he did about religion, and had sought to convince him by many ingenious arguments that it would be much better for him to accept scientific materialism as a working theory of life.

"It's of no use, Dubois," said Arthur, after listening for some time, "trying to prove to me that it is wise and prudent to do as you advise. Prove to me that it is so, you do not any the less make it palpably visible to my mind that, even on strictly scientific grounds, your materialistic philosophy cannot be justified. Natural philosophers say that for a scientific theory to be worthy of belief it must account for all the facts with which it assumes to deal. But a materialistic philosophy of life can only be made a logically coherent theory by simply ignoring much that is opposed to it. You seek, for instance, to evade the difficulty presented to belief in your creed by the unique heterogeneity between consciousness and matter, by lumping consciousness with other phenomena as a co-effect; that is, you seek to hinder

the difficulty from being observed by a little verbal conjuring—you seek to hide the speciality of consciousness by sticking on to it an ordinary label. You may possibly delude your own mind by so doing, but my cantankerous mind distinctly refuses to be so deluded. It, like yours, craves for a theory of life that has simplicity and definiteness, but it objects to seemingly attain such a theory by arbitrarily cutting out truth to a pattern that suits. It longs too ardently to possess the whole truth. The helmet of salvation of the new faith that you invite me to don, I see too plainly is only a pasteboard one.”

“I am not proposing for your acceptance,” answered M. Dubois, “a philosophy that I regard as speculatively perfect, but rather one that, I think, supplies the best *working* theory of life that is attainable at present. You demand that the unattainable shall be attained, and the unanswerable answered, or you will have nothing to do with any theory. I only hope you will not finish by falling a victim to the humbug of spiritualism. The helmet of the armour of that new faith I urge you to wear you despise as a pasteboard one. I know too well that it is a sadly inefficient protection to the head against many blows that Fate may deal; but at least it is sounder than the helmet of the old faith: *that* is rotten and eaten into holes from the rust of ages.”

"Then I elect to do without a helmet of salvation at all; I will brave Fate bare-headed," replied Arthur.

This was only saying, in a grand way, that he meant to maintain a mental attitude of impotent indecision, so far as the adoption of any definite belief to live and die by was concerned; that he meant to go on as heretofore, swinging backwards and forwards unrestingly, about midway between the two extremes of the final teaching of Strauss and that of Pius IX.

But the scepticism of his reason vanished when, owing to the shock given it by the terrible circumstances of his mother's death, his mind became tyrannised over by wildly disordered feeling. This, not reason, then dictated his dominant ideas, and to it ideas that were terrible were alone congenial. Those more appalling portions of the recorded teaching of Christ that he had hitherto regarded as simply too terrible to be true, were now eagerly assimilated by his mind, and *felt* as the most real of realities. In this changed mental state the shocking circumstances of his mother's death appeared to him invested with a supernatural horror. In a self-torturing religious retrospect of his life he saw himself but as a wretch who had spent his day of grace in forging chains to bind himself a prisoner in hell. He heaped up, in thought, a multitude of occurrences that he

regarded as warnings to him from heaven ; he recalled numberless happier moments in which some sweet, mysterious inner voice seemed calling on him to lead a higher, nobler life ; and he remembered that all these had been in vain. Some grand dispensation of Providence to arouse him being then, he further thought, called for by his continued hardness of heart, the only being on earth he loved had been stricken with mortal disease—had been doomed, through him, to death by slow torture. He had seen the progressive succession of horrors that attended the execution of this sentence borne by his mother with resignation, and unshaken trust in God, and yet he had not repented. Impiously, as her end drew near, he had sat drunkenly sleeping at her bedside, when he ought to have been waiting, reverentially, for her farewell words of admonition. Still long-suffering Heaven yet willed to try one supreme, one final effort for his salvation. His sainted mother had, with the chill of death upon it, stretched forth her sacred hand to awaken him, poor slumbering sinner, that he might hear words from a dying Christian's lips inspired by the Divine Spirit Himself, and he had blasphemously repulsed Him—the *Holy Ghost*—with a curse ! He had driven hope from his soul, and given himself over to everlasting despair ; he had committed the unpardonable sin !

The intensity of his mental sufferings was too extreme for them to be long sustained. However insatiable the passion for self-torture in diseased human souls may be, it is permitted to them to realise but fleetingly "the infinite horror," at least in this world. After a while Arthur sank into a state of sullen, apathetic melancholy, weary of everything, indifferent as to what became of him, destitute of all vivid feelings whatever. His life, temporarily, became one that, in any high sense, could hardly be regarded as *human* life at all. It resembled rather that of a blighted vegetable, if to that were given the dismal consciousness of being blighted.

In this pitiable condition of nervous prostration he lost the aversion to intoxicating drinks that had seized him at his mother's death. Thoroughly demoralised, he sought to spur his jaded nerves into some excitement by free indulgence in alcoholic stimulants. Under this course of life his bodily health passed from bad to worse, and at length utterly broke down. He then consulted a physician eminent in the treatment of nervous diseases. By him he was told that he must at once become a *total* abstainer from all beers, wines, and spirits, and that unless he did so all other treatment would be useless.

"But," objected Arthur, vexed at the emphatic way the doctor uttered the word "total," "I must

explain to you that my drinking of alcoholic liquors is not an artificial habit that I have formed myself. The affinity for them in my constitution comes to me by inheritance, on my father's side, and seems to me as one of my natural instincts. Manifestly it springs from special modifications in my nerve-structure, brought about originally by nerve registrations of the alcoholic experiences of my forefathers. I take to alcohol, then, from an innate tendency similarly evolved in the past to that which causes a young duck to take to the water. That does so from instinct, does it not?"

"From healthy instinct—you take to alcohol from a diseased instinct. If you want to be healthy, you must follow the young ducks' example and take to water. 'Use,' you know, the late Duke of Wellington said, 'is ten times nature.' You must use yourself to do without alcohol, and try and get the habit of doing without it to become, with you, ten times stronger than the diseased craving for it."

"May I not take a glass—only one glass—of pale ale at my dinner?"

"No. Nor half, nor a quarter of a glass. If you do, like the tiger that has tasted blood, you will excite in yourself an uncontrollable craving for more."

But Arthur had not just then the moral courage

to be a teetotaler all at once ; he thought he would try and become one by degrees. He did try, and failed disastrously. His health from alcoholic poisoning became terribly impaired, and he suffered from so great a loss of brain-power as to be often quite unable to mentally make the easiest arithmetical calculation, or even to answer correctly, on the spot, the simplest question. Utterly unfitted for business, he was forced to give up his situation at Messrs. Hammer, Strike, and Slaughter's. Finding that the physician was right, he then made up his mind to follow his advice, and all at once gave up drinking entirely.

Leaving his situation did not involve him in any pecuniary embarrassment, for five thousand pounds, in Consols, in which his mother had had a life-interest, had become his absolutely at her death. Being then in circumstances that permitted him to do so, he determined to go to the seaside for six weeks or two months. What he should do afterwards he left dependent upon the good or ill health that Fate might have in store for him. Broadstairs being a favourite little watering-place of his, he selected that as the one where he would seek to repair his shattered health.

He had remained up to this time (the middle of June) in the same house in which his mother had

died, though not occupying the same rooms. The landlady there happened at the time of his bereavement to have a small sitting-room and bedroom vacant suited to a bachelor. Giving up these lodgings to go to Broadstairs, his landlady kindly undertook charge of all luggage he did not want to take with him. She also permitted him to leave, locked up, his old mahogany bookcase with its miscellaneous collection of, for the most part, worn and faded volumes — a collection that he had been slowly gathering together during his life, principally by making bargains, as chance offered, at second-hand bookstalls.

These arrangements made, he took up his temporary abode at Broadstairs. He remained there seven weeks, at the end of which time he found himself much stronger and better than on his arrival. He had carefully abstained from all alcoholic drinks during this time, and felt resolved, at the end of it, to continue to abstain.

Improved in health, he naturally became less disposed to look at the dark side of things than he had been a few weeks previously. Calmly reconsidering, in this more sane frame of mind, what was probably the nature of the communication his dying mother had purposed making to him, but had died without making, he became satisfied that he had been mis-

taken in esteeming it to be of a directly religious character. From the manner in which she had regarded the miniature, considered in connection with all that he knew about her love for his father, and from her specially, immediately after contemplating the portrait, giving the gold locket containing it to him to keep in remembrance of her, Arthur saw that it was manifestly about her lost husband that she intended speaking to him. And he had no doubt that she had thus formally made him the owner of the locket that she might charge him with the fulfilment of some earnest wish of hers that was to devolve upon him as the possessor of the locket in her place. That wish he could conceive of as being substantially nothing else than that he, as far as such a thing was possible, should voluntarily constitute himself, after her decease, as the living representative of her undying devotion to her husband. She wished that out of love to *her* he would force himself, if the opportunity of doing so should offer itself, to act towards one whom he did not love as if he did. She wished that in the event of her husband, after her death, returning to seek her, no indignation or severity towards him on her account should be displayed by her son, but that his treatment of the returned prodigal, so far as acts were concerned, should be such as profound affection would have inspired. In short,

she wished him then to become, to use his uncle's words, "a very monomaniac of love" in action in regard to his father, though he was quite the contrary in heart.

The fact, however, that the carrying out of what, he was now satisfied, was his mother's last wish, would, should the occasion for its being fulfilled arrive, demand a sacrifice on his part, he rather rejoiced at than otherwise. But irrespective of any pain or pleasure that so doing might bring with it, he at once decisively constituted himself the living representative of her so-called "monomania."

His mother had changed her place of abode several times since her brother's death, but she had always been very particular in keeping her solicitors, Messrs. Hardy and Ibbettson, informed of her whereabouts, as she expected that if ever her husband returned he would apply to them for her address, as he knew Mr. Hardy very well. She had also instructed Messrs. Hardy and Ibbettson that should her husband happen to come to them at any time when she might be out of town, and should then require a little money for immediate necessities, they were to supply him with it on her behalf. Arthur now wrote to these gentlemen to say that the death of his mother was not to make the slightest difference in regard to the carrying out of any instructions of hers as to the steps they

were to take in the event of the possible return of her husband; but that they were to regard him as occupying her place, and as making himself responsible for all instructions that she might have given them on the subject. This done, and a reply from the solicitors having been received that the instructions in his letter would be duly attended to should the occasion for doing so arrive, Arthur experienced a greater degree of composure of mind than he had done for some time.

CHAPTER III.

RED IS LIKE THE SOUND OF A TRUMPET.

At the end of his seven weeks' stay at Broadstairs Arthur began to be tired of the inactive life he had been leading there, and to feel restless and to want a change, so he gave his landlady notice that he intended to give up his lodgings in a week. He then occupied himself in trying to resolve what he should do when the day for leaving should arrive. After having spent four days in continually changing his mind, he at length decided to start on a walking excursion. He had a great desire to see Canterbury, which, for one reason or another, he had not yet done, though he had been living so near it. For this reason he selected that city as the place whither he would at first wend his way. At Canterbury he proposed to remain as long as he felt inclined, and then to continue his tour, but in what direction he left undetermined. He arranged with his landlady to take care of his box, in which he had packed the greater part of his clothes and other things, until he

wrote for it. The few articles absolutely necessary for him to have with him he put in his small travelling-bag, and, burdened only with this and his umbrella, the day for his departure having come, he set out.

It was a glorious August morning. The sun shone resplendently, the air was beautifully clear, and there was a delicious sea-breeze. Arthur's habitual sombreness temporarily vanished, and thoughts bright and sparkling as the flashes of reflected sunshine that seemed to dance on the sea-waves enlivened his mind. Led away by the pleasing sensations he experienced, he over-estimated the real improvement in his health that his sojourn at Broadstairs had effected; and the thought suggested itself to him that if eight weeks in the country air had been so beneficial, might not breathing it for a prolonged period—say for one or two years—convert him from a sickly into a healthy man? And health being of inestimable value, might he not, he asked himself, so shape his plans for the future as to make a long residence in some salubrious country spot practicable? Not in the humour to see, or invent, difficulties to carrying out such a project, he did not consider long before he mentally gave an affirmative answer to the question. He would, he thought, take a lodging at some humble, rural cottage, and be con-

tent to live entirely on the income he had coming in from his five thousand pounds in Consols. The cottage that, in fancy, he pictured as his future home, was to stand on a hill, and have a garden attached, in which he might be permitted to occupy and amuse himself by helping to cultivate it. Of course he would have down his bookcase and books, now being taken care of by his former landlady at the Regent's Park; but he meant primarily to think more of developing his muscles than his brain.

The more he dwelt upon it, the more he became pleased with his idea. The hardy-looking little children that, as he passed along, he every now and then saw playing outside the cottage doors, with their fat legs and arms and chubby red faces, bearing testimony to the advantages of pure country air, encouraged him in indulging in sanguine expectations as to the wonderful influences it would have upon himself. In fancy, he saw the Arthur Howard of the future with his spindle legs so changed, that even if breeches came into fashion he need not feel alarm; his lank arms, with their flaccid apologies for biceps, developed into members that a muscular Christian might not blush to own; his dirty, sallow complexion transformed to one of healthy hue, and his lantern jaws exchanged for plump round cheeks. Looking thus brightly on the future, he passed lightly

over the ground, and had gone many miles on his journey before he felt the slightest semblance of fatigue.

He arrived at Canterbury about noon the second day after he quitted Broadstairs, having slept on his way at the comfortable roadside inn known as the "Daubigny Arms." But though the pleasurable state of excitement he was in during his journey kept him from feeling tired, his sensations after it was ended told him he had over-exerted himself. He felt jaded and weary, and in a condition of mind utterly unfitted to a due appreciation of the magnificent Gothic temple whose fame draws travellers from all parts to the ancient city. And so, when he saw it, it failed to kindle in him any vivid enthusiasm of admiration, though he diligently endeavoured to experience such emotion. That he could not succeed in so doing caused him to feel disgusted with himself, and to curse the perversity of his ill-regulated mind. Nor did he attain to any happier state of feeling by attending the afternoon cathedral service. Its chilling inappropriateness to its mediæval surroundings made him shiver at the heart.

"How mockingly lifeless," he then thought, "appears a ritual coldly decorous and reasonable performed in the midst of this sublime embodied dream of the devout imagination of the past! The miserable

contrast gives me the bitter consciousness of a departed glory. I feel as a Jewish worshipper in the second temple mourning the absence of the Shekinah from the Holy of Holies. Even the stern Puritans destroying images here were, in spirit, more in accord with the mediæval saints than these compromising men in possession. For those stern Puritans were terribly in earnest—they, too, were possessed by a sublime fanaticism—they, too, had the grand idea of making the kingdom of God triumph upon earth. But what is the grand idea of the Laodicean Christianity of the English Church of to-day? Janus-faced, to frown politely at the same moment on warring Scepticism and Catholicism, and comfortably to seek to split the difference between them. And it is this double-faced, half-and-half religion that the irony of Fate has permitted to be set up—where? In those Gothic cathedrals whose venerable walls exhale an awe-inspiring influence, urging to prophetic earnestness—whose pavements are hollowed by the knees of saints who of old agonized in prayer before what they believed to be the Divine presence resting on their altars.

“ I remember, too, the names of the great prelates who, in the ages of faith, sat on the episcopal thrones of these cathedrals, and, as I do so, am filled with contempt for the mitred, sleek courtiers who are

their successors. 'Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, so *their eyes waited*' on the First Lord of the Treasury; but solely by his power having been put into their sees, they are not ashamed to pretend that it was the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, that elected them. I would only believe in the boasted apostolical succession of these gentlemen if it could be traced up satisfactorily to Judas. Till that is done they are for me but episcopal shams—mere government overseers (very necessarily, from the nature of the work they undertake, wearing black aprons)—perched on bishops' thrones, to see that the candles on cathedral altars, symbolising the light of faith, are kept *extinguished*."

He was brooding on the last-mentioned fact as one having a sardonic significance, when that peculiar hollow sound that any noise causes in a large empty building was produced by some subdued, but seemingly intentionally forced, coughing, and this aroused him from his state of abstraction. Raising his eyes, he saw that the service was over and the congregation dispersed, and that a funereal-looking verger, key in hand, was waiting at the only open entrance to the choir. As the eye of Arthur caught that of the verger, the latter, instantaneously, coughed no more. In a weary way Arthur then got up from his seat, and,

looking like an unhappy ghost, vanished into that altarless, naked part of the cathedral that is left open to the public, and the funereal-looking verges locked up the choir and flitted away.

Passing along the nave, the dreary mental condition that he was in caused Arthur there to be reminded of a grove of skeletons of lofty trees interlacing their boughs overhead and covered with frozen snow. The cold white glare of light coming from the large windows of colourless glass in the aisle on his left hand appeared to him as the painful glare of snow; the whole glacial aspect of the vast house of prayer seemed to chill him like an icy winter blast. In desolation of heart, he felt that that spirit of fervent prayer that, like fire divinely enkindled, burnt in the souls of devout worshippers in that temple of old, now flamed heavenwards, in miraculous power, through its venerable arched roof of stone no more; that the believing, *praying* spirit that once haunted that sacred place had been frozen to death by the biting north wind of the critical *protesting* spirit.

After a day spent in a dismal manner he set out in the evening from the Rose Inn, where he had put up, with the intention of seeking to refresh himself by taking a walk in the fields. In sauntering along listlessly, seeking to get out into the open country, he presently found himself in a long street of poverty-

stricken cottages on the outskirts of the city, swarming with dirty and squalling children partly naked and partly covered with rags. In front of a low public-house a group of these miserable children's mothers—slatternly, blotch-faced creatures with unkempt hair—stood gossiping and squabbling. "*I'll have your umbrella!*" cried out the youngest amongst these women to Arthur chaffingly as he passed, and then put out her tongue at him as he turned his big dreamy eyes upon her.

All this but served to aggravate the disagreeable frame of mind he was in. He felt dissatisfied with himself, regretted that he had come to Canterbury, was oppressed with a sense of the pettiness, the meanness, and the dreary commonness of human life. It appeared to him, then, as no better than a weary farce. And the actors in it, what were they? A set of stuck-up tailless apes, wofully ignorant of their parts, and got up in unmeaning, makeshift attire; their legitimate costumier Nature having been inexplicably abandoned by them.

Taking his "pleasure sadly" in this fashion, he went musingly on his way, when, after having traversed a narrow lane that, with the elms that grew on each side of it and thickly mingled their branches overhead, struck him as having a certain rude resemblance to the interior of a gloomy Gothic

church, he suddenly, on passing through a swing-gate, found himself in the open country. The lane here gave place to a narrow pathway, that passed obliquely to the left across a cornfield. This foot-path led up, by a gradual ascent, to a road running right and left to it, with which it communicated by a stile. On the opposite side of the road to the stile, and facing the cornfield, was a roadside inn, and on either side of this, and in a line with and at some little distance from it, a row of cottages. The upper windows both of the inn and of the two rows of cottages were at that moment glowing like crimson fire from the rays of the setting sun. At this sight a great, a thorough, an inexplicable change took place in Arthur's mental state as suddenly as if from the touch of an enchanter's wand. An overpowering consciousness of the mysterious grandeur of human existence seemed flashed into his spirit by that dazzling crimson light. Life no longer appeared to him as a weary farce, but was *seen* as a noble tragedy, and his hitherto will-less soul exulted in a sense of volitional power that made heroism and martyrdom seem for him as sublime possibilities. He stopped and rested motionless in a sort of ecstasy.

A blind man is said to have described *red* as being like the sound of a trumpet. This description seems to have a certain ring of extravagance about it, when

considered in connection with the degree of stimulation red ordinarily produces. But the display of redness that had just flashed upon Arthur's eyes affected him as if he had heard a host of war trumpets sounding a grand fanfaron. This excitement, however, lasted but for a few moments in the plenitude of its power. It subsided, to leave him in a state of wondering curiosity.

The air around him, he then thought, seemed strangely still even for the hour of sunset. Nature appeared to him to be holding her breath. Stirlessly the ripe corn around him stood ready for the reaper's sickle. Motionless and fainting from drought, bright scarlet poppies here and there showed their drooping heads. Arthur, from the great influence that the poetry of Wordsworth had had upon his mind, was fond of contemplating flowers as if endowed with something akin to human personality. On the present occasion his whimsical fancy suggested that the poppies were hanging their heads in dying shame that their own *royal* colour of bright *scarlet* (Nature's *rare* colour) should prove less dazzling to any human eyes than a mere reflection from clouds *crimsoning* a lot of *guillotine* windows.

"*Guillotine* windows!" he repeated to himself, broodingly. "Does not their being of that make offer some clue to their affecting me so strangely with the

crimson of sunset upon them ? The guillotine is the too notorious trade-mark of the French Revolutionists. Might not that long array of guillotine windows glowing like red fire, suddenly presented to my eyes, have vaguely awakened in me reminiscences of the emotions I experienced on reading Mr. Carlyle's strange and terrible word-panorama of the deeds of a nation stung to madness by cruel hunger and oppression ? And would not the sympathy that was excited in me by reading of the enthusiasms and heroisms displayed during that national madness be likely to be the most prominent amongst those obscurely, but tumultuously, revived emotions ? Or may not that profoundly despairing view of the tendencies of the age inspired in my romantic mind when, in my teens, I read Burke's passionately eloquent lamentation over the extinct spirit of chivalry that the *guillotining* of Marie Antoinette caused him to pour forth from his heart, have been emotionally, though not intellectually, recalled to my mind ? And may not this, through a sort of recoil, have fired me with a dazzling flash of exalted chivalrous feeling that lifted my spirit up into sympathetic union with the glorious heroes and martyrs of the past ? ”

But having reflected upon the preceding questions, as he walked slowly on across the field, he felt forced to come to the conclusion that the houses towards

which he was advancing, having guillotine windows, did not supply any explanation of the strange mental experience that he had just had. He became satisfied that the make of the windows had had nothing to do with the way that they had affected him, and that if they had been casements he would have been affected exactly the same as he had been. It was, he became convinced, simply through his fanciful conceit of treating the poppies as personalities, and poetically sympathising with them as feeling naturally grievously insulted and humiliated because he had been first attracted, not by their own royal colour of scarlet, but by a blood-coloured tinge on lifeless panes of glass, that had caused his eyes disparagingly to notice that the latter were in guillotine-shaped frames. And in fact he now discerned that he had then only seen them all to be so because he wished to do so. Looking now along the whole line of the windows in question more discriminatingly, he saw that only some of them were of the guillotine pattern, and that a considerable number of them *were* casements.

Finding himself quite at sea in his speculations, he resolved to make altogether a fresh start in seeking some adequate cause of the strange mental excitement he had just experienced. In what way, he asked himself, could there be shown to be any relations between brilliant red light, reflected by a num-

ber of ordinary panes of glass, and the peculiar exalted state of consciousness momentarily produced in him on seeing it? Such a spectacle had never so affected him before: what were the special circumstances that had made it do so at that moment? Why should those particular rays of light, coming into contact with his eyes, have excited in him exactly the flow of nerve-currents that was necessarily coincident with such a state of mental exaltation? Why should his soul, an *unextended* entity, have been thus affected in so *uncommon* a manner simply because the extended object, his body, married to which he found *himself* traversing time, told him of a quite *common* occurrence in the external world?

Pondering perplexedly upon his novel experience, he arrived at the stile on the other side of the field. He had just placed his left foot upon the first step, with the intention of crossing over the stile, when there seemed to come across his mental vision, as it were, a faint and vaguely-defined shadow of a coming thought—of a thought that was *overtaking* him—that would solve his difficulty. He stopped immediately, his left foot resting just as he had placed it on the step of the stile, fearing to move lest, perhaps, by a change in the consentaneous contraction and relaxation of certain muscles, the exact adjustment of the bodily machinery requisite to accompany the

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evolution of the thought might be deranged. The expected thought, however, did not come, and its projected shadow passed away: it was but the mere shadow of a mental bubble floating in the rear of his intellectual eyes, that burst before it could reach a position in front of them. He sat down on the stile, with his face towards the cornfield, and, ceasing to make any conscious efforts to solve his intellectual puzzle, waited patiently to see if some spontaneous mental action might not do so for him.

As he thus sat, the dying splendours of a glorious sunset were before him. Disappointed in finding any plausible solution of his mental problem offer itself, he sought to let the glowing spectacle that met his eyes kindle in his mind a becoming feeling of admiring delight. To no purpose. His capacity for rapture was temporarily used up. Was the *blasé* feeling, then, that the reflected crimson light upon the windows had so strangely dissipated about to come back to him? As he uneasily asked himself this question, the thoughts and images that had been present to him while under the influence of that used-up feeling were recalled. But the weary, disenchanted state of feeling did not return with them. The strange emotional exaltation by which he had been lifted up, though quickly subsiding, had not left him to fall into his previous grovelling mental state, but had

safely landed him at a higher point of view from which to calmly contemplate the drama of life. The ludicrous family likeness between apes and men, and the remarkable resemblances in their manners and morals, no longer filled him with contempt for his species. But that near relationship of man with beasts, that modern scientific research had forced him to recognise, rather inspired him with brooding, wondering curiosity as to the meaning in Nature of such an anomalous creature as man. Highest in the scale of life, the greatest and most complex of animals, and yet as a *mere* animal the greatest of failures. Capable of multiplying indefinitely the means of animal gratification, but mockingly incapable of creating an adequate power to enjoy. Stirred with mighty longings other than those of sense, but tortured with the consciousness of being impotent to satisfy them. As Nature's pet, alone of all her offspring left (free from any definitely prescribed law of his being) to do as he likes, yet forced by the necessities of his position to voluntarily subject himself to cruel arbitrary restraints. The conqueror of his fellow-animals, and reigning over them with a despot's sway, yet a King doomed as His royal diadem to wear a "crown of thorns." The being that such reflections placed before his mind he saw to be no mere mountebank burlesque of royalty for cynical

levity to yawn and titter at, but a veritable unfortunate monarch—the victim selected by the Fates to present in its highest and most revolting form the mystery of pain—whose sufferings merit the deepest pity, and whose future, enveloped in awful darkness, cannot be contemplated without terror.

As he continued sitting upon the stile, with his eyes fixed upon the ground, absorbed in melancholy thought, he was presently aroused by a voice, exclaiming—

“Holloa, Howard! what are you doing here?”

Looking up, Arthur saw his friend Andrews standing before him, waiting apparently to get over the stile.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BARMAID AT THE "GRAPES."

"I SUPPOSE you've come over here from Broadstairs for the day?" said Andrews, as Arthur stood up and shook hands with him. Arthur had written to Andrews about a fortnight previously, and spoke in his letter as if he was still likely to remain at Broadstairs several weeks.

"No; I left Broadstairs for good the day before yesterday, and walked on here."

"Walked, eh? Then I suppose you're a great deal better than you were?"

"Don't you think I look better?"

"Well, perhaps you do, but there's a precious strange look about you."

"How do you mean 'strange'?"

"Oh, I mean that you have such a scared look, that if I had not known you, I should have taken you for an escaped lunatic."

"Thank you."

Andrews, who had taken out of his mouth the

meerschäum he was smoking in order to talk to Arthur, here replaced it, remarking as he did so, "You *are* a cure ! "

Arthur let him take a few whiffs tranquilly, and then said—

" You're down here on business, I suppose ? "

" Yes ; I'm making an inventory of the furniture at Abbey House—close by here—which we have just let furnished for a year. It's a long job ; I have already been four days at it."

" You're not very fond of country work, I think that I have heard you say. You find the evenings too dull for you, don't you ? "

" Not in this case."

" How's that ? "

" I have become awfully spoony on a bit of muslin since I have been down here."

" There's a pretty lady's-maid at Abbey House, then, I suppose ? "

" Not a bit of it. The only female society there just now is an old griffin of a housekeeper and an antiquated housemaid. Guess again."

" You're smitten with the barmaid at the inn where you're staying, perhaps ? "

" You have guessed right this time, and that's the pub—the ' Grapes ' opposite—where the dear creature hangs out, bless her heart ! " said Andrews, pointing

to the inn, on the upper windows of which, in conjunction with those of the cottages, the reflected red glow of sunset had so singularly affected Arthur. "And an awfully jolly little pub the 'Grapes' is," added Andrews, "though it don't look much outside. I'm going back there now after having had a little stroll and a smoke after my tea: suppose you come with me? There's a very pleasant tea-garden there, where we can sit and whet our whistles and have a gossip about things in general."

"My throat *is* rather dry," replied Arthur. "I don't mind coming and having some lemonade with you."

"With a little sherry in it," rejoined Andrews.

"No—no sherry in it for me," said Arthur, very decidedly, and looking at Andrews as if he was an evil spirit tempting him. He thought of what once came of drinking brandy-and-water at his friend's invitation.

"Very well," said Andrews, "have it without sherry if you like; but don't stare at me as if I was the devil. Come on."

They crossed over the road at once, and entering the tea-garden by a gate at the side of the inn, sat down in one of a row of alcoves, the trellis fronts of which were almost entirely covered by a Virginia creeper. Andrews struck vigorously with his walking-

stick on the rustic table before them, as a summons for some one to take his order. A good-looking girl with fair hair soon appeared, and smiled very pleasantly when she saw Andrews, with whom she immediately began to talk and joke in a familiar manner. Arthur, remarking that her silk neck-ribbon and the pattern of her muslin polonaise were both bright blue, felt vividly how very becoming that colour is to blondes, but he also felt, what he was quite unable to explain, that the girl's face was not at all unfamiliar to him.

"Well, what shall I get you?" she asked Andrews after a minute or two.

"A bottle of lemonade and nothing in it for my friend here," he answered; "and for me a pint of cooper in the pewter, and please, Jemima, draw it stouty."

When the girl had left to fetch the lemonade and beer, Arthur looked at Andrews, and said—

"Is that the bit of muslin?"

"Yes; she's a niece of the landlord's wife: but do you know her by sight? You seemed to recognise her."

"I have a strong impression that I have seen her before, but I can't think where. I'll have another good look at her when she comes back. Did you know anything about her before you came down here on this job at Abbey House?"

"Nothing at all. The butler at Abbey House is a friend of the landlord of this house, and brought me here the evening of the day I began to make the inventory. That's how I first became acquainted with the dear creature."

"The dear creature" soon reappeared with the things ordered, and again had some bantering conversation with Andrews, who insisted upon drawing the cork of the bottle of lemonade for her. Arthur took the opportunity of rescrutinizing her face. It had an expression with which he seemed decidedly familiar—an expression as of a face that he had been in the habit of frequently seeing—and yet, most strangely, he could not recollect any one occasion on which he had done so. This produced in him such an uncomfortable feeling of perplexity, that when the girl had left and his companion commenced talking to him, he listened only in a most annoyingly abstracted manner. Andrews at length became impatient at this, and shaking Arthur by the arm, said—

"I'll tell you what it is, Howard: leading an idle life will never do for you long. Unless you have something to occupy your mind you'll soon go cranky."

This remark aroused Arthur. The fear that his nervous sufferings might ultimately result in his im-

prisonment in a madhouse had often troubled him. He thought of his project of living a secluded country life for one or two years, and felt much discouraged. To obtain sufficient occupation at *his* business to keep him from pernicious moping, and at the same time to enjoy all the advantages of a thoroughly rural life, would, it seemed to him, be a matter of great difficulty, if not an impossibility. He explained his difficulty to his friend, who said—

“I think I can tell you of something that will just suit you. You have often heard me talk of my father’s great friend, Brown, the auctioneer and house-agent at Reading. They’re old schoolfellows, you know, and you of course remember meeting Miss Brown—Brown’s only daughter—at the wedding of my sister and Dubois. Well, I took a run down to Reading to see Brown a few Sundays ago, and he was telling me he is often in want of extra help in the way of making catalogues and inventories. An articled pupil of his who was extremely useful to him left him a month or two ago, and a new pupil that he has, has naturally everything to learn in the business. Under these circumstances Brown is obliged, when his permanent clerk has more than he can do, to have a fellow down from London—who acts as supernumerary to auctioneers and house-agents who may want extra help—but that comes

expensive. Brown told me he wished he knew somebody nearer Reading that he could employ. Wouldn't it be a nice thing for you to live at some healthy country spot near Reading, work for Brown on those days on which he wanted extra help, and have the rest of your time to take your pleasure? I'll give you a letter of introduction to Brown, if you like."

"Thank you, I should be glad if you would. It might, at all events, suit me for a time to do as you suggest."

"Very well; we'll adjourn presently into the bar-parlour—I have the privilege of *entrée* there—and if Jemima will supply the materials, as I have no doubt she will, I'll write you the letter there."

"Thanks."

"There's another thought has just struck me," said Andrews, after a minute or two's silence spent in smoking, "that perhaps may be of service to you. It's like throwing money away for you to let all your money remain in Consols. If you were to invest some of it in good house property, you might get seven per cent. for it. Brown has houses that pay him nine or ten per cent. He bought them of builders, who, being pressed for ready money, sold them cheap. Perhaps he might put you into the way of doing the same if you were to consult him on

the subject. If you had some house property, looking after it and collecting your rents would be a little amusement for you."

"But if I go to Reading I may not stay there."

"In the case of your leaving it, and holding houses there, you could appoint Brown as your agent: he, I have no doubt, would only charge you half-commission."

"I must think over what you advise. I don't mean to let all my money remain in Consols, and I suppose good house property is about the safest and most profitable investment that I could find."

"I should rather think it was," rejoined Andrews; and then added, "and if you *do* go to Reading, you should cultivate the acquaintance of Miss Brown. That will be easy enough to do, as you and she got to be so friendly at my sister's wedding."

"But that's a good while ago; very likely Miss Brown has forgotten me by now."

"Not she. Why, when I was at Reading the other Sunday she asked after you, and said that she should never forget your describing yourself to her as 'a dyspeptic skeleton with a withered heart.'"

"And I," rejoined Arthur, smiling, "shall never forget her drolly solemn manner as she replied to that remark that my appearance plainly told her what was the matter with me—I was 'a martyr to the midnight lamp.'"

"She is an oddity for a girl," replied Andrews, "and one that your style of talk just tickles the fancy of. In fact, it would be doing her a kindness, as well as good to yourself, for you to talk a little nonsense to her now and then, for she tells me she finds her life at Reading very dull."

Arthur made no reply to this remark, but appeared to be lost in thought. He was, however, only lazily recalling to his mind Miss Brown as she appeared as the bridesmaid whom he had to take care of at the wedding of his friend Dubois.

Andrews looked at his companion and slightly shrugged his shoulders. Quite despairing of drawing him out into an amusing conversation, he drained his pint pot dry, smacked his lips, and then said, "If you have no objection, we'll go now to the bar parlour, and I'll write for you at once the business letter of introduction to Brown. I feel sure he will be pleased to avail himself of your services, when needing extra help, on learning that you have been engaged at our place. He thinks Hammer, Strike, and Slaughter A 1 in the auctioneering and estate agency way."

Arthur being quite agreeable to do as his friend suggested, they entered the house together. In a few minutes Andrews was sitting at the Pembroke table in the little bar parlour with all that was requisite for writing the letter before him.

"The mixture as before, my dear," he said, turning to the landlady's niece before beginning to write. "Your black draught has done me a wonderful deal of good—I'm sure you understand my constitution—and you may as well bring me a screw of tobacco, for I shall soon want it."

On the re-entry of the barmaid, Andrews, after she had put the pint of cooper on the table (there being no one else present besides Arthur), made an attempt to kiss her. She playfully struggled to hinder him. As she did so there was a free gaiety, a laughing abandonment, in her manner that riveted the attention of Arthur. Thus looking at her, he discovered by a flash of recollection how it was her face seemed familiar to him—in her he recognised an exact likeness of a nymph in the celebrated painting, now in the National Gallery, of a "A Bacchanalian Dance," one of the masterpieces of the master of whom Sir Joshua Reynolds has said that "he studied the ancients so much that he acquired a habit of *thinking* in their way." * This picture had always had for Arthur a singular fascination, and expressly to contemplate it he had paid many a visit to the National Gallery. He had an engraving of it, too, by Van Merlen, that, being slightly soiled and in a frame that was rather worn and chipped, he had bought cheap at one of

* Nicolas Poussin ; born 1594, died 1665.

Messrs. Hammer, Strike, and Slaughter's sales. This he had left, when he went to Broadstairs, in the care of Mrs. Potts, his late landlady at the Regent's Park, hanging over the chimney-piece in the bedroom he had occupied in her house. Admiring, sympathetic contemplation of the "Bacchanalian Dance," and of the engraving of it that he possessed, had often enabled him to vividly feel in imagination that joyous abandonment to the sensuous pleasure of the moment that he was denied from knowing experimentally by his miserable organisation. In the barmaid he seemed to have living before him, the Bacchante that, in the picture referred to, is striking with a cantharus the satyr that has interrupted the dance. This discovery started in his mind a whimsical train of thought, that he let run on unchecked, for his own amusement, while Andrews and Jemima continued romping.

"Is this giddy girl a work of Nature's"—so ran his fantastic train of thought—"of which there has been an earlier edition? Is Poussin's 'Bacchante' a portrait of perhaps some artist's model of the seventeenth century, who was the fac-simile of this lively barmaid? That, though not impossible, seems very unlikely. Nature is not fond of servilely repeating herself, but loves variety: the chances, therefore, are unnumbered thousands to one that no *exact* counterpart of Jemima existed at the precise time that the

'Bacchanalian Dance' was painted. Going upon probabilities, it is only reasonable to conclude, then, that in her I see, not a servile copy of a girl who lived in the seventeenth century, but one who, regarded in her entirety, presents a new design in human personality. The notion that Poussin's 'Bacchante' is a portrait of a real person dismissed, I must regard it as a likeness of a phantom of the French artist's imagination—a likeness that is in reality a pictorial representation of the archetypal idea of a then future Jemima. Poussin's imagination would appear, in this case, to have been to Nature what a kaleidoscope is to a designer of patterns of carpets and floorcloths. By this designer a succession of coloured, symmetrical patterns are obtained from a kaleidoscope, until one *chances* to present itself suited as a *design* for a new carpet or floorcloth. That Nature has let so long a time elapse before manufacturing the figure on Poussin's canvas into a flesh-and-blood reality may be owing to more urgent jobs having fully occupied her 'molecular machinery.' The 'Bacchante' of Poussin admitted, then, to be a manifest foreshadowing of this romping girl, it strikes me as most singular that, in conjunction with this personal likeness, both the one and the other should be presented to my attention as identically circumstanced; for, as barmaid at the

'Grapes,' must not Jemima be also regarded as a nymph devoted to Bacchus? In all this can I do otherwise than discern a wonderful manifestation of the identity of the inspiration of artistic genius with the inspiration of prophecy? Such a feat of imagination in regard to the future appears worthy of being compared with that remarkable one displayed by Turner in relation to the past—strangely enough, too, displayed in a picture that, according to Professor Ruskin, was painted under the guidance of Nicolas Poussin, the painter of the 'Bacchanalian Dance'! Painted before the forms of the geologic reptiles were known, Turner's Dragon guarding the Gardens of the Hesperides has since been remarked to be very like an iguanodon that has borrowed the wings of a pterodactyl. In this our great art critic sees a marvellous demonstration of 'the instinctive grasp which the healthy imagination takes of *possible* truth, even in its wildest flights.' The wildness of this artistic flight is, indeed, made very great by the necessarily borrowed wings; but is not the marvellousness of the demonstration equally lowered by them? Poussin's creation, though inferior in wildness, is superior in nearness to truth, he not being called upon to make sprout from the shoulders of his nymph the wings, say for example, of a duck. In the fair guardian of the bar and tea-gardens of the 'Grapes' I behold a living

fulfilment of Poussin's pictorial prophecy; but did there ever exist on this planet an animal composed of the wings of the *carnivorous* pterodactyl joined on to the body of the *herbivorous* iguanodon? The constitution of the wings of such a dragon would not fit them to flourish on green stuff. How could they get a supply of *fleshly* nourishment to supply the waste of tissue in them? And would it be *possible* for a *vegetarian* dragon to act as *protector* of a *garden*? That imaginary Hesperidean dragon that, to Professor Ruskin, is so wonderfully in harmony with *possible* truth, will not let me forget that it was in a pantomime at Drury Lane, Turner said, it was first suggested to him.* I must admit that, in the prophetic portrait of Jemima, Poussin has made her rather more meaty than she actually is; but manifestly this is no departure from *possible* truth. No doubt she was a little older than at present when Poussin had his 'mind's eye' on her. His genius, piercing the darkness of the future, instinctively, it may be presumed, cast its lightning-like flash upon her just as she would be at the highest point of her physical development. In his vision of her, she doubtlessly appeared like some tempting fruit *fully*, but freshly, ripe, with the bloom

* The present authorities of the National Gallery do not appear to share Professor Ruskin's admiration for Turner's wonderful compound dragon, for the picture containing it is *now* hung so high, that the pterodactyl wings are invisible, and even the iguanodon body almost looks as if disappearing in the clouds.

yet resting on its form filled out plumply round by luscious flesh—a joy to satyr eyes."

These whimsical reflections were brought to a close by Jemima being vanquished and kissed, and immediately afterwards crying out, as she pointed to her brooch that was broken, " See what you've done with your big hands! "

As she did so her face assumed a serious and vexed expression, and Arthur noticed that its likeness then to that of Poussin's " Bacchante " was by no means so striking as when brightened by heedless merriment. Under its changed aspect, however, Arthur's feeling that there was an expression in the barmaid's face with which he was familiarly acquainted, instead of being diminished, was rather strengthened. It had not, then, been fully accounted for by his perception of her resemblance to the nymph in Poussin's picture. But he had not long an opportunity of contemplating Jemima in a state of vexation: the owner of the clumsy hands promising to replace the broken brooch by the present of a much better one, quickly restored the young lady to good humour.

Having refreshed himself with a hearty draught of beer, Andrews sat down to the table with the intention of writing the letter of introduction for Arthur that he had promised; but after looking about for a few moments, as if he had lost something, he said—

"What in the name of fate has become of the pen?"

"No doubt it has rolled on the floor," remarked Arthur in reply. "I have already picked it up once, and put it on the table."

While speaking, Arthur drew near to the side of the table, and, bending forwards, looked for the pen on the floor. At the same moment Andrews also stooped with the same object, and his head came gently in contact with that of his friend. To Arthur's surprise, Andrews then started up, as if something had hurt him, and cried out—

"Hang it, Howard, what are you about? Though you are a regular Mary Ann, I never dreamt that you wore hairpins."

Fancying that the lively barmaid had been indulging in some practical joke with his hair, Arthur gave up his search for an instant, in order to look at himself in the chimney-glass. In so doing he discovered the missing pen sticking in his hair above his right ear. From force of habit acquired as a clerk, he saw that he must have unconsciously taken it up and put it behind his ear, instead of letting it remain on the table, after he had picked it up and placed it there, as he had told Andrews he had already done once. Pushed out of its place by the point touching his friend's head, it must have been saved from falling by being caught in his own hair.

There was something so supremely ridiculous in the whole affair, that the little party in the bar parlour, on perceiving the position of the pen, all burst out into a hearty fit of laughter. Arthur then, at the sight of his own face in the looking-glass, scarcely knew himself, so great a novelty was it for his haggard features to be seen disporting themselves in the sunshine of laughter. Just by his right shoulder, reflected in the glass, he saw also the face of Jemima, and he was startled at discerning what a striking resemblance it had to his own, as it was then unusually lit up by mirth. He saw in himself a very decided ugly likeness of the good-looking barmaid. At the surprise caused by noticing this his laughter ceased, and his curious resemblance to Jemima became but little perceptible. This made him understand why the seriousness of her expression on discovering the damage to her brooch had impressed him as it had done : it was an approximation to that which his own face usually wore. And it was evidently necessary that the features of their two faces should be so adjusted as to express similar states of feeling for the likeness between them to be distinctly seen.

"I am sorry, Howard, to interrupt you in your amusement of pulling ugly faces at yourself in the glass," said Andrews ; "but if you can extract it

from that mop of yours, perhaps you'll have the kindness to pass me the pen."

Arthur gave the pen to his friend, who at once set about writing the promised letter of introduction. Jemima had to leave the room to serve a customer at the bar. To pass the time, Arthur took up and looked at the *Maidstone Gazette*, but was unable to understand a word of it, so much was he bewildered by the discovery of his likeness to the "Bacchante" of Poussin come in the flesh.

When finished, Andrews read aloud the letter he had written, and finding it approved of, enclosed it in an envelope, duly addressed, and handing it to his friend, inquired of him—

"When do you think you shall go to Reading to see Brown?"

"Most likely to-morrow—at all events I shall go to Reading to-morrow." Arthur had given up all idea of continuing his walking excursion.

"You'll find Brown not a bad sort of fellow, though he is rather a starchy old buffer, and always carries his head as if he had got a stiff neck."

Hereupon Andrews lit his pipe and seated himself loungingly in an arm-chair, manifestly contemplating a prolonged stay in the smart little bar par'our.

"Don't you call that a scrumptious little bit of

goods?" he said to Arthur, giving a jerk of the head towards the bar.

But the "scrumptious little bit of goods" removing itself at that moment from the bar to the little parlour, prevented Arthur from replying to his friend's question.

"You have had a good spell of customers in the bar," said Andrews to Jemima. "You have got it all to yourself this evening, it seems."

"Yes, for a little while," replied Jemima.

"How soon do you expect Death?"

"In about an hour's time."

"Is anybody ill here, then?" asked Arthur.

"Oh, no," said Jemima, laughing; "Mr. Death keeps this house."

"You're in Death's house," said Andrews, with mock solemnity. "But in the name of fate, my Canterbury pilgrim, what *have* you been doing with yourself? Never have I seen a head on a live man's shoulders so like a death's-head as yours is just now."

"If I were to meet him alone at night in a churchyard, looking like that, I'm sure I should faint," said Jemima, to whom Andrews had winked.

"But seriously, Howard," continued Andrews, "you do look dreadfully haggard—your long walk I'm afraid has been too much for you; you must be

very tired. I should recommend you to go to bed early to-night."

Arthur, who was morbidly sensitive about forcing his company upon any one, was much hurt at this hint to go. He at once got up to leave, and put a florin in the barmaid's hands, saying—

"Take for one lemonade, two pints of cooper, and a screw."

"Give him his money back," said Andrews to Jemima; "I'm going to stand Sam." And then turning to Arthur, he added, "It was I invited you here, not you me."

"I prefer at least to pay for what I have had myself," said Arthur.

"As you're so proud, then, I'll toss you who shall pay for all."

"Tossing means losing with me," objected Arthur, who was uncomfortably anxious to get away.

"Never despair, man," answered Andrews; "try your luck once more."

They tossed, and Arthur lost. He paid the barmaid and took his leave.

His leaving delighted the laughing lovers. He was very much in the way in that little bar parlour; the landlord and his wife being unexpectedly out. With an arrow from Cupid's bow quivering in and tickling his heart, Andrews was longing to take vows of

consecration to the joyous service of Cupid's sweet mother. But who, with becoming gay abandonment, could dedicate himself to the worship of the Goddess of Beauty, the Mother of Love, and the Queen of Laughter, in the depressing presence of a person with upper extremities reminding him of a ghastly death's-head on living shoulders?

CHAPTER V.

HOUSE AGENCY AND FINE ART.

ARTHUR arrived at Reading the afternoon of the day following his meeting with Andrews, but being weary and depressed, did not call on Mr. Brown until the next morning. That gentleman having read his letter of introduction, expressed himself as much pleased; the supernumerary clerk from London that he had been in the habit of employing, had not, he said, given him satisfaction.

"I hope," said Arthur, "that you will not have occasion to be dissatisfied with me, should you think proper to give me anything to do."

"One very unpleasant thing with him," continued Mr. Brown, "is that he often quarrels with the men-servants when he is engaged at establishments where they are kept. That is calculated to be very prejudicial to my interests. Now as, from the letter of introduction you have brought to me, I shall certainly give you a trial, I would wish that in your dealings with the men-servants of my clients it should be

strongly impressed upon your mind that civility begets civility."

Mr. Brown spoke these words with a solemn affectation of superior wisdom. To be addressed in that manner always irritated Arthur. And besides, two things in Mr. Brown's personal appearance provoked him—his hair was most evenly trimmed and carefully plastered down with grease, and his head was pilloried in a stiffly-starched white cravat. As in dressing his own hair Arthur followed the style displayed in the photographs of Mr. Tennyson, he saw in Mr. Brown's primly-arranged and glossy hairs a formal condemnation of his own dishevelled ones. And any man sporting a white cravat when it was not customary for those in his position to do so, Arthur always capriciously suspected to be a solemn humbug—a mere quack claimant to high respectability. As an admiring student of Mr. Carlyle, anything like a sham naturally inspired him with savage indignation. Nor was there anything calculated to excite more merciful feelings in the appearance of the face of the pilloried head before him : it was a mere offensive exhibition of pomposity and pimples. Arthur felt an almost irresistible desire to say something very annoying. To have done so would, however, have plainly been very imprudent, considering the object of his interview : he was obliged, therefore, to restrain

himself. But he could not help treating Mr. Brown's admonition as quite unnecessary, and said—

“ Oh, I find that by treating butlers with the most profound respect, and footmen as superior beings, I can always get on very well with men-servants.”

Mr. Brown did not look very well pleased at this. He paused for a few moments, and then said pompously, “ I expect to be able next week to give you a trial. I have a large valuation for probate coming off—a very large affair indeed.”

Though he might have got a job that seemed a large one to a country auctioneer, Arthur thought, yet most likely it was one that would appear small to a former clerk of such a London firm as Hammer, Strike, and Slaughter. He did not, consequently, condescend to be much interested.

“ You will no doubt,” continued Mr. Brown, “ feel it is a piece of business deserving your best attention when I tell you that it is the valuing for probate of the effects of a deceased gentleman of this neighbourhood, who has just been buried by Panting.”

“ Buried by Panting ! ” echoed Arthur, in a tone of respectful surprise.

“ Yes, and a very fine funeral it was. I went into the cemetery to see it with my daughter. By the way, what splendid black silk Pantings make use of at their funerals ! My daughter had an opportunity of

quietly scrutinising and feeling some of it as we stood by the grave during the service, and she tells me that she has never before met with any silk to equal it; to make use of her own words, it was 'something perfectly lovely.' "

Arthur's lively imagination was excited at this remark, and he seemed to hear the rich black silk *rustle*, and to fully realise all the solemn magnificence of being buried by Panting.

"You are probably rather surprised," added Mr. Brown, "that I have got this valuation, and not Panting, but it is given me by a solicitor for whom I have done several small things in the neighbourhood, with which he has been very well pleased, but on which my commission has hardly paid me for my trouble. He promised me, however, to give me some better business as soon as he could; and as this job on which I intend to employ you is the first important affair that he has entrusted to me, I am naturally anxious that it should be very well done."

"You may rely upon me doing my best," said Arthur.

"I wish you to make the inventory just in the same way as you would do for a first-rate West-end London house. A great deal of the furniture is from Jackson and Graham's, and is of a very superior kind, so it is worth being very carefully described.

Put in French words where it is the fashion. You understand French ? ”

“ Sufficiently well for the purpose you mention.”

“ Have you ever lived in France ? ”

“ I have been to Paris twice, for a week each time, and I have stayed one night at Boulogne.”

“ That’s not long enough to learn much.”

“ No ; but I lodged for two years in the same house as a Parisian professor, with whom I became very friendly, and he took considerable pains to try and teach me the French language. I refer to M. Dubois, who married the daughter of your friend Mr. Andrews—very likely you may know M. Dubois ? ”

“ Only by name ; but my daughter knows him personally. She was one of the bridesmaids at the wedding of Miss Andrews, and she has visited her and her husband several times since, when she has been in London.”

“ I also was at M. Dubois’ wedding, and so had the pleasure of meeting Miss Brown at it,” said Arthur.

“ Oh, indeed ! but I recollect now hearing my daughter speak of meeting a Mr. Howard on that occasion,” answered Mr. Brown, slightly grinning.

Arthur saw that he had heard of him as the “ dyspeptic skeleton with the withered heart,” and felt somewhat disconcerted.

“ You have had the advantage of having a good

French master," added Mr. Brown, more gravely ; "for M. Dubois, I understand, possesses qualifications above the average—speaks English like a native, and has a diploma from the University of Paris."

"Yes. No doubt he is a very efficient teacher, but I do not think that I have any great aptitude for the acquisition of languages, though. However, I have managed to learn as much French as I want for business purposes."

"Very good. I will now, if you please, ask you one or two questions in order to test your pretensions in this matter. How, for instance, would you describe the material with which the chair on which I am sitting is covered—not, I presume, by its common name of American cloth ?"

"No. I should call it *toile cirée*."

"And—let me see—in the job I spoke of just now you will have numerous and costly ornamental articles to describe. Now, how would you, for example, describe an ormolu French clock with, say, the usual figure of Napoleon on top—you know ?"

"In this way—as a Parisian timepiece in a *bronze dorée* case, surmounted with equestrian statuette of *Napoléon Premier* crossing the Alps."

"Very good indeed. I will just test your proficiency in this particular way with one other question, and that shall be all. You would not, I presume, think of calling a couch a couch ?"

"O no! I should describe it as a *causeuse*."

"*Bong!*" said Mr. Brown, patronisingly, evidently wishing Arthur to understand that he had to do with a gentleman proficient in Parisian French. "I may mention," he went on, "that there are several first-class carriages on the premises where the probate valuation I have referred to has to be made. One of them, not long home, new from Peters's, is the prettiest little four-wheeled chaise I have ever seen—in fact, a complete *shay Dover*. All these you will take care to describe correctly. If you are not quite certain how to do this, you will, of course, make the necessary inquiries that will enable you to do so. But probably you are an expert in describing such things."

"I ought to be, having been many years at Messrs. Hammer, Strike, and Slaughter's," replied Arthur. "Do you think you shall want me soon?"

"On Wednesday, I expect; but if you will call here to-morrow morning, I shall most likely be able to let you know decisively."

"Is the house far from here?"

"No; between two and three miles."

"Might I inquire the name of it?"

"Mount Lebanon House."

"Mount Lebanon House! Oh, I know it quite well! Four years ago I had to go to it several times on business."

"There is a sketch of it, painted by my daughter," said Mr. Brown, pointing to a water-colour drawing of a country mansion hanging against the wall. "The late proprietor, who is just dead, had some thoughts of selling the property, if he could get a good offer, and so put it on my books."

Arthur got up and placed himself in front of the sketch, in order to look at it well, but failed to recognise it.

"It is a fine house," remarked Mr. Brown. "Do you think my daughter has succeeded in making a good sketch of it?"

"Well," answered Arthur, "I am afraid that I must have forgotten what the place was like, for I don't recognise it. But perhaps the house has been much altered since I saw it four years ago."

"No; there have been repairs, but no alterations of the exterior, since then. In what way do you fancy that it seems changed?"

"I have no recollection whatever of the very highly ornamental roof represented in the drawing, nor of that magnificent portico at the principal entrance."

"Just so; I told my daughter that I thought she had made it look rather too pretty, but she explained to me that she had simply idealised a little."

"Ah, I understand; she thinks that pictures to be

exhibited in house agents' offices for business purposes should not belong to the realistic school of art. Of course the public must be humbugged a little. People would not go and look at houses if we did not represent them as 'very desirable' or 'charming' residences."

Mr. Brown looked serious and did not answer. He probably felt that, in justice to his white cravat, he could not profess concurrence in such views as Arthur had expressed. He did not, however, venture to contradict them. To give the conversation a turn more pleasing to him, Arthur remarked—

"There can be no question that if Mount Lebanon House was altered so as to resemble Miss Brown's drawing of it, it would become a much handsomer building than it is now. Miss Brown has manifestly excellent taste."

"It is admitted by competent judges that my daughter *has* excellent taste," said Mr. Brown, with dignity. "She was for some time in London, studying at the School of Art at South Kensington. That drawing *there*"—Mr. Brown pointed to one hanging against the wall—"is a fanciful design, entirely her own, for a country villa, the front ornamented and enriched in what she terms the pure Moodyesque style."

Arthur regarded the drawing indicated in perplexed

surprise. He remembered having heard from his friend M. Dubois that the Parisians termed the model English cottage in the gardens of one of their great Exhibitions *le God-dam*; what *would* they then, he thought, have called a villa after Miss Brown's design, with its extraordinary façade adorned with ornaments and enrichments in the pure Moodyesque style? He stood still, gaping at her design in silent astonishment, Mr. Brown mistakingly supposing that he was momentarily struck dumb with admiration.

"I am at present," said Mr. Brown, after a brief silence, "negotiating for the purchase of a plot of land in a beautiful situation near Reading—chosen by my daughter herself—on which to build a villa precisely according to her design."

"Arthur would have made some reply, but just then a gentleman entered the office to inquire about houses. Mr. Brown, in consequence, dismissed Arthur by saying, "I do not think I have anything more to say to you to-day, Mr. Howard. I shall expect to see you to-morrow morning."

On calling at Mr. Brown's office on the following (which was Saturday) morning, as requested, Arthur learnt that it was definitely arranged for him to commence making the inventory at Mount Lebanon House on Monday.

"Mr. Death, the late butler at Mount Lebanon House," said Mr. Brown, "who has but recently given up his place and taken an hotel, will be there to assist you. He was for many years in the family of the deceased proprietor, and knows more about the contents of the house than any one else. There are some things that are not to go down in the inventory, as they belong to one of the late proprietor's friends who is at present on the continent. Mr. Death will show you what those things are."

Arthur was struck by the name of the ex-butler. As it was so unusual a one, and as men-servants often become proprietors of public-houses, it suggested itself to him as not very improbable that he was to meet, on Monday, the landlord of the "Grapes," near Canterbury. Mr. Brown, he thought, might have been incorrectly informed as to its being an *hotel* that Mr. Death had taken. He hoped it might be so; should he meet the landlord of the "Grapes" he might get from him some information about the young bar-maid there who had so strangely excited his curiosity.

"Do you feel certain that it was an hotel you heard that Mr. Death had taken?" inquired Arthur. "You don't think that you were told that it was a public-house?"

Mr. Brown slightly raised his eyebrows, as if he thought the supposition that he had made a mistake

a somewhat impertinent one. "I don't *think* anything at all about it," he answered. "I know that I was told that he had taken an *hotel*. I hope you will take care not to annoy Mr. Death by asking him unpleasant questions, but, as a matter of business, treat him respectfully. Be at the house punctually at ten. You can call here for the valuation books, that you will want, as you pass here on Monday. Good-morning."

On arriving at Mount Lebanon House, on Monday morning, Arthur was shown into the housekeeper's room, where Mr. Death sat waiting for him. After some preliminary talk about the business that had brought them together, and more particularly of the very large quantity of plate that there was to be valued, Arthur gave a turn to the conversation to suit his own purpose, by saying—

"It must be a position of responsibility, attended with much anxiety, to be butler in a large establishment where there is a great deal of plate to look after. It is far preferable, I should think, to get one's living in a little place of one's own. You have recently taken an hotel, I am told by Mr. Brown?"

"No—nothing so grand as that—only a country public-house and tea-gardens, a mile or two from Canterbury."

"Not the 'Grapes,' is it?"

"Yes it is. You know the house, then?"

"I was there one evening when you were out, a few days since, with a friend of mine whom you also know, I think—a Mr. Andrews—in the same way of business as myself."

"Mr. Andrews is a friend of yours, is he? I'm glad of that, as I shall be able to know a little more about him. He seems inclined to stick up seriously to my wife's niece, the young lady that you, of course, saw in the bar at the 'Grapes,' when you were there."

"Oh yes; and I saw that she and my friend were carrying on a strong flirtation; but I did not think it was likely to turn out a serious case."

"You were mistaken. Mr. Andrews told me before his return to London that he was the young lady's accepted lover. Do you know what sort of screw he gets at Hammer, Strike, and Slaughter's?"

"Not enough to get married on—two guineas a week."

"But I should think he's a young man who stands a good chance of getting on at his business."

"Well, yes; he has a fair chance of doing that, I suppose. I am afraid, however, his father is not likely to be able to assist him in starting in business for himself."

"His father is a doctor at Northampton, he told me—isn't he doing well, then?"

"Very moderately so; and, like a good many more nowadays, I believe, finds much difficulty in making both ends meet. But do you think that Miss—I haven't the pleasure of knowing the young lady's surname."

"De Vere."

"Do you think that Miss De Vere is likely to make my friend a good and economical wife?"

"Well, I should fancy so. I can't say, though, that I know much about her, except that she seems a nice, lively girl."

"You don't know, then, what sort of mother she's been brought up by? That's an important point to be considered in judging what sort of wife she's likely to make."

"No, I really can't tell you. It's only just over a month that I have been married to her aunt, and I have never troubled myself to ask prying questions about my wife's family. I believe she has no relations that she cares anything about except her niece, who is our barmaid. I'll explain to you my position. The butler at Abbey House, near Canterbury, who is just leaving on account of the house having been let furnished for a year, is a friend of mine, and has been in the habit of using the 'Grapes.' He, knowing I thought of marrying, introduced me to the widow who kept it, who is now Mrs. Death. I liked her, and I

liked the 'Grapes,' and so its landlady being willing I married her; but no relations of hers came to the wedding, except Miss De Vere, nor have I had to do with any since."

"But I suppose that you have heard something about Miss De Vere's parents?"

"Scarcely anything, I assure you. My wife is not on friendly terms with her sister, Miss De Vere's mother, and does not care to talk about her."

"Then Miss De Vere has a mother living?"

"Yes."

"And a father—do you know?"

"I believe he's dead, but I don't know anything about him, and, what's more, I don't want to know."

At this moment they were interrupted by some one tapping at the room door, and on Mr. Death's invitation to come in, a housemaid entered and said—

"The bedrooms are all quite ready, Mr. Death."

"Very well, Susan," he answered; "we're coming up to begin the inventory directly." Then turning to Arthur, as the housemaid went away, he said, "We had better get to business at once, I think."

"All right," answered Arthur. "I usually commence with the top right-hand room."

"Follow me, then," rejoined Mr. Death, at once leading the way.

During the five days that Arthur was engaged at

Mount Lebanon House he made several attempts to draw Mr. Death into further conversation about the barmaid at the "Grapes," and about her family, but without success. When he parted from him, on the valuation being finished, he had learnt nothing more from him than what has been given in the conversation just narrated. Was Mr. Death's professed ignorance on the subject real, or was it only assumed because what he did know he judged it better to conceal? Asking himself this question, Arthur could not help suspecting that the latter was the case, for his careful inquiries seemed to make Mr. Death uncomfortable.

Arthur succeeded in very much pleasing Mr. Brown by the manner in which he performed his task at Mount Lebanon House, and that gentleman promised him his patronage on any future occasions on which he might require the services of a supernumerary.

CHAPTER VI.

“IT IS BETTER TO DIE THAN TO SIN.”

HAVING the promise of employment as Mr. Brown's supernumerary clerk, Arthur now decided to look out for country lodgings near Reading. On first arriving in the town he had put up at the “Commercial” inn, and after having slept there one night procured private lodgings the next morning. His work at Mount Lebanon House finished, he amused himself for several days in exploring the surrounding country, seeking the rural home his fancy had pictured. Ultimately he found much what he wished for in a very humble but picturesque little cottage built in the half-timber style, with a thatched roof and a quaint rustic porch overgrown with ivy. It stood alone, a little way back from the road, in its own garden, and being situated on elevated ground it commanded a fine view. Upon timing himself and making the experiment, Arthur found it an easy walk of about three-quarters of an hour from the cottage—which was known as Daisy Cottage—to Mr. Brown's office.

He congratulated himself upon having found a home that seemed to realise in so many respects the one he fancied he would like. No doubt there was something almost painful in the poverty that the interior of the cottage displayed. But, though poor, it was evident that the withered old woman who tenanted it, who gave her name as Mrs. Hogg, was a fanatical devotee of the scrubbing-brush and the wash-tub. The floors, the white dimity curtains, and all else that could be washed were scrupulously, even finically, clean. And then, though what furniture there was was very old-fashioned indeed, that appeared not unsuitable to the style of the cottage. Besides, it was so old-fashioned that, without much exaggeration, might he not agreeably think of it as verging upon the antique?

Full of childish delight at the idea of living in a real thatched cottage, with an ivy-covered porch, he entered upon possession of his country lodgings on a Monday afternoon, just a fortnight and two days after he had arrived at Reading. His delight, however, was somewhat alloyed by his observing that a niece of Mrs. Hogg, who lived with her but whom Arthur now saw for the first time, looked in very bad health. This caused him to be troubled, as soon as he was left to himself, with some degree of doubt as to the salubrity of the situation. Mrs. Hogg had assured him, when

he first came to look at the lodgings, that the neighbourhood of Daisy Cottage was "the most healthiest" in all Berkshire, and that a gentleman who had lodged with her the last summer had declared that coming to live there for a time had saved his life. But the old woman, Arthur now thought, might have been humbugging him in order to get him as a lodger. To satisfy himself upon this point he resolved to regard the niece more attentively than he had as yet done, and, as soon as a convenient opportunity occurred, to question her as to the cause of her sickly looks. It was she who brought up his tea, and so, while she was arranging the odd and chipped tea-things upon the table, he made a careful survey of her personal appearance.

She appeared to be between sixteen and seventeen years of age. Though of average height, she was miserably thin, and altogether undoubtedly looked in wretched health. Her nose was pinched, there were ugly dark marks under her eyes, her complexion was of a faint and sickly yellow. From the way in which she had her red hair pulled backwards from her forehead, her peaky little face, with its expression of suppressed suffering, seemed to protrude itself upon the attention in a painfully conspicuous manner. A strange, hopeless, yet beseeching look in her bluish-grey eyes appeared to Arthur to be appealing to him

for his compassion. She recognised him, he thought, as a brother in the freemasonry of misery.

The signs of ill-health and suffering displayed by the poor girl were the more painful to Arthur to contemplate, inasmuch as it needed less imagination than he had to discern that her features were such that if they had been genially expanded instead of being blightingly contracted, that is, if they had been fully and healthily developed, a girlish face very pleasing to look upon would have been the result. In her, Nature had apparently been struggling to create a pretty girl, but had failed to secure the fulfilment of *all* the requisite conditions. Just so might the idea of some new sweet air of music fail to be expressed through the instrument on which it was essayed by its originator being deficient in many notes, and yet not fail so thoroughly but that some tantalizingly suggestive expression was supplied of what the music would have been could all the notes have been given. The idea sought to be embodied in her, though but dimly hinted at, was sufficiently manifested to inspire Arthur with disappointment and sadness at Nature's failure to attain her aim. The poor, unwholesome-looking young creature before him was regarded by him as a melancholy example of creative energy frustrated in a somewhat ambitious effort—the sight of her had a very depressing effect upon him.

That he should thus happen to be seriously depressed annoyed him much, for mental depression, he knew too well, acts very perniciously upon the digestive powers, and he was just then about to have a tea-dinner. Some business he had attended to for Mr. Brown prevented him getting his dinner, as usual, in the middle of the day. Having eaten only a biscuit since his breakfast, he had now a keen appetite, and this was sharpened by the savoury odour from a mutton chop that he had brought with him from Reading, and that was now served up smoking hot with his tea. Drawing up to the table impatiently, he did not wait for the girl to finish arranging the things on it—which she was very slow and awkward in doing—but commenced eating the mutton chop at once. While so doing, a sniffing sound caused him to look up at the face of his mal-adroit domestic. Her nostrils dilated and slightly twitching, and her head inclined towards his plate, indicated that she was inhaling with relish the savoury fumes of his chop. And he caught her eyes in the act of following, hungrily, the large juicy morsel of mutton on the fork, that he was just raising from the plate to his mouth. She reminded him of one of those famished stray dogs that sometimes steal into an eating-house, and then watch, with eager, imploring looks, a customer dining. The girl

coloured as he stared at her, and becoming embarrassed in setting down the sugar-basin, that she had just then in her hand, nearly knocked over the milk-jug. In a somewhat frightened way, she then regarded the contents of the table, apparently uncertain whether she had brought all that was necessary, or had arranged the things properly. She did not appear to see very well, or else she was very stupid.

“That will do,” said Arthur, anxious to get rid of her; “if I find there is anything else that I want, I’ll knock on the floor—I see there is no bell. You’ll be below, I suppose, to hear me—Rotha, I think it was, I heard your aunt call you?”

“Yes, sir, Rotha is my name. I shall be sure to hear if you knock.” So saying, she crept timidly out of the room.

But she did not also pass out of Arthur’s mind as he desired. That hungry look that he had happened to detect on her face haunted him, and made him ill at ease. He devoured his chop with but little relish. His uncomfortable state of feeling was, however, partially mitigated when he reflected that, after he had finished tea, and she had cleared the things away, she would be able to help herself to bread-and-butter. He felt momentarily much indignation that her old aunt should not give the poor girl enough to eat; but his indignation was soon softened by the possibility

suggesting itself to his mind that Rotha, who was manifestly in a very unhealthy condition, might have what is termed in vulgar language "a wolf in her stomach."

When Rotha cleared away the tea-things, Arthur was busy unpacking in the bedroom, and hence he had not any favourable opportunity of speaking to her again that evening ; for tea was his last meal : night-mare he thought too great a price to pay for suppers.

On noticing the condition of the loaf as brought up to him at breakfast, his suspicion that Rotha might have "a wolf in her stomach" deepened into a conviction. And he was dreadfully vexed to see that, by one slice that had been cut off, by far the most nicely baked portion of the crust had been removed. As an invalidish person, he was naturally very dainty and fanciful with his food ; and he had particularly remarked, the previous evening, that the crust referred to was baked exactly to his taste—well browned, but not at all burnt. He had in a pleased way looked forward to the Epicurean enjoyment of eating that crust with a thick layer of fresh butter at his breakfast. In annoyance at finding this enjoyment denied him, he stared savagely at the loaf and then at Rotha. He could not help, however, almost forgetting his anger, and being very painfully impressed, on observing how very ill the poor little girl looked.

"You don't seem well, Rotha," he said; "how's that? I thought this spot was considered a very healthy one; but perhaps you have not lived very long here?"

"Only about six months," she replied.

"And before that, where used you to live?"

"In London, sir. I used to work at a milliner's, where I was learning the business; but I was always ill, and at last got unable to do my work, and the doctor said unless I left London I should go into a decline, so my aunt here took me. She works often in the laundry of a large house near here, called Mount Lebanon House, and she thought I might attend, when she was out, on any one that might be lodging here, and that she might be able to get me a little needlework to do."

"And your father and mother—do they live in London?"

"I have no father and mother."

"And you have not found your health improved by living here?"

"No, sir; not much yet."

"I should have thought the bracing air would have given you a good appetite, and that then you would have got stronger."

"Oh, it has given me a good appetite."

"But still you don't find your food nourish you?"

"No, it isn't that, sir; but soon after I came here aunt met with an accident, and has not yet been able to work since, and I've only been able to get very little needlework to do, and the lodgings have not let, so that many days lately we have had scarcely nothing to eat."

This took Arthur so by surprise, and it struck him as being such an odd thing to come into the country and gain an appetite, and then have nothing to eat, that he could not help laughing. This was very unfeeling on his part, but the stealing of his crust had momentarily hardened his heart. Rotha, who had naturally expected her statement to have called forth from him some exhibition of sympathy, seemed much pained at his hilarity, and began to cry. She was standing, facing Arthur, close against the table, and in talking to him had leaned a little over it. It was with alarm that he then saw his mutilated loaf was so placed beneath her face, that there was danger some of her tears might fall upon it and spoil the crispness of what crust was left. He reached across the table, and catching up the loaf, quickly commenced cutting off a slice of it, as if he was in a hurry to begin breakfast. Rotha took this as a hint that he had had enough of her company for the present, and left the room.

It seemed, however, that the poor girl was destined

to vex him in whatever she did for him, for when, having finished breakfast, he was about to put on the boots that she had cleaned for him to wear that day, he found that she had cleaned two odd boots instead of a pair. He had put two pairs of dirty boots outside his bedroom door, and though both of the pairs were lace-up boots, there were some very perceptible differences between them, one pair being much more worn than the other. The mistake, then, that Rotha had made seemed to him the result of downright carelessness. At his kicking angrily on the floor, she quickly made her appearance in a fright.

On his showing her what she had done, instead of at once acknowledging her mistake, she peered at the boots as he held them, as if it was by no means evident that they were not a pair. Much annoyed, he gave them an impatient swing towards her, so that the toes accidentally struck her, at the same time saying in an angry tone—

"My good girl! there's no occasion for any critical examination of the boots; any one who can't see that they are not a pair must be either a fool or blind."

"I *am* almost blind this morning," she said, sadly.

At these words Arthur's anger cooled, and he felt rather ashamed of himself.

"That is a great affliction," he said. "You ought to consult an oculist."

"I have been, sir, to the Ophthalmic Hospital, when I was in London, but the doctor there told me there is nothing the matter with my eyes; it all comes from weakness. Sometimes I can see pretty well, at others only badly, and sometimes for a little while I am almost blind."

At a loss what to say to her by the way of consolation, Arthur contented himself with the common-place words, "I hope that you will soon get better."

Being in a hurry, on account of a business appointment, he requested her to clean and bring up to him, as quickly as possible, one of the two odd boots that remained dirty. As soon as she had done this he took his departure.

The work that he had to do that day for Mr. Brown was merely to make an inventory of the fixtures at a small house in the town, to be attached to an agreement for letting. This took him but a few hours to do. After it was finished he dined at the "Commercial" inn, and then sauntered gently home.

To reach the staircase of the cottage where he lived, it was necessary to pass through the front room on the ground floor. On entering this—the entrance-door was only kept closed by a latch that could be raised outside—he found no one there, but he heard the voices of old Mrs. Hogg and her niece in altercation in the back room, and, thinking that

he heard his own name mentioned, he stood still and listened. As he did so he soon discovered, to his great surprise, that Mrs. Hogg was scolding Rotha because she refused, from scruples of conscience, to eat any of the bread that the old thief had cut off his loaf.

"You little fool!" he heard the voice of Mrs. Hogg exclaim; "you have had nothing to eat since yesterday morning, and you look quite faint and bad, and yet from some ridiculous canting notions that you have taken up with, you refuse to eat what I give you. You'll be laid up if you go on like this."

"I can't eat bread that's been stolen," the voice of Rotha replied.

"What nonsense those chapellers have put into your silly little head! If you wait upon the gentleman, do you suppose he'll mind you eating some of his bread? Doesn't the Bible say, 'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn'?"

"But I am not an ox, aunt."

"No, you're an ass. There, let me have no more of this foolery, but take and eat this nice crust that I cut off on purpose for you this morning, because you're so fond of crusts. I have been keeping it for you until you came to your senses. You can't expect your poor old aunt to waste money on bread for you when she has a gentleman lodger. You know I have

to save up all I can to pay my doctor's bill. There! now I've spread it with the gentleman's beautiful fresh butter, I'm sure you can't refuse it. Besides, you know, my poor old jaws haven't the teeth to chew a crust with, so if you don't eat it, it will be wasted, and it's a sin to waste bread."

Rotha appeared not to answer this time, but Arthur heard a sound as if she was crying.

"What, snivelling again!" said the voice of the old woman. "There, very well, I can't have you die of hunger, though you are a fool. Take this sixpence, *do*, and go and buy a half-quartern loaf."

On hearing this Arthur immediately ran upstairs into his sitting-room, not wishing to be caught playing the detective. It greatly distressed him to find that he had, unjustly, suspected Rotha of having stolen his bread. His brutal behaviour to her that morning was remembered with bitter regret, and the pitiful, half-blinded eyes presented themselves before his mind in a way that wrung his heart.

Several books that he had recently borrowed were lying on a small side-table in his sitting-room. Without looking or caring what was the subject upon which it treated, he caught up one of these, and sat down in a chair by the open window.

He had just discovered that the book in his hand was Mr. Darwin's "*Descent of Man*," when he heard

the entrance door of the cottage slammed, and looking out of window he saw poor famishing Rotha set out to buy a loaf.

It was an intensely hot August day; one of those summer days such as there are very few of in England, the heat of which reminds returned Anglo-Indians of the climate of Ceylon. Exposed to the full power of the afternoon sun's fiercely burning rays, the half-fainting girl staggered along the white and dusty road. She had only gone a few dozen yards on her way when she appeared quite overcome, and sat down on a heap of stones by the roadside, putting up her hands before her face seemingly to protect her feeble eyes from the sun's glare. After his conduct in the morning, Arthur did not like to go down and offer to help her on her way. He feared that his presence might rather make her uncomfortable than be agreeable, and that to escape from him and justify herself in refusing his aid she might force herself at once to continue her journey, instead of resting as long as was necessary. And to go and tell her that he gave her permission to eat some of his bread would be to own that he had been playing the spy. He cast his eyes along the road to see if anybody was coming who would be likely to befriend her; any other poor girl who might offer to go with her or for her to the baker's; any lady to revive her with her smelling-

salts ; but he saw no one at all in the road. Some distance beyond Rotha, on the opposite side of the way, in the grounds of a newly-built Gothic villa, a lady sat sketching in the shade of a drooping ash-tree, but a wall prevented her seeing into the road.

Looking from the lady-artist back to the poor girl resting upon the heap of stones, the ruthless antagonism between the physical and moral circumstances of her life was distressingly forced upon his attention. In her lean and sickly person he beheld a marred design of the Artist of the Universe ; and yet, in fulfilling the highest law of her being—the moral law—she was helping to mar this design still more, to aggravate the already painful deficiency of healthful physical beauty in a body that ought to have been a deification of animal form. At this reflection a deep sadness possessed him. Even the bright sunshine that, from the gladness with which it inspires men's hearts, they have learnt to regard as Nature's smile, at that moment, as it illumined the beautiful landscape before him, seemed to him a *strangely melancholy* smile.

As the weary girl continued sitting by the wayside, he noticed a passing butterfly hover above the muslin rose in her straw hat, apparently mistaking at a distance the vulgar mockery for a real flower. A glance on a near approach was sufficient for it to

discover its error, and it flew in disappointment away to seek for flowers not made by human hands. No marks of frustrated effort, thought Arthur, were to be seen in its beauteous form; the conditions essential to its perfect development had been fulfilled, and Nature exulted in a realised ideal. Had that more ambitious work of her hands over which the gay insect had for a moment fluttered been equally favoured, a veritable incarnation of laughing poetry would have been achieved in the form of a healthy and merry pretty girl in her teens. Instead, he beheld a sadly abortive attempt at a God's image disfiguring the foreground of a lovely rural scene. From its melancholy presence, though, spread before him on the one hand were fine orchards with trees, the boughs of which bent beneath their burdens of ripened fruit, and on the other hand (except about two acres walled in as the grounds of the Gothic villa just referred to) was a large expanse of rich fields of golden corn ready for the reapers; yet all this display of Heaven's bounty awakened no feelings of joy or thankfulness within him. And the gay carolling of a lark fell upon his ear but to suggest to him the notion of its sounding like a song of mockery at his own and Rotha's sorrows. As this thought floated across his mind like a gloomy cloud, the sweet warbler chanced to descend to the earth, and im-

mediately that it touched it its song of joy was silenced. This incident, too, had to Arthur a suggestive significance of a painful kind, and set his mind brooding in distressed perplexity upon the dark "riddle of the painful earth."

The half-fainting Rotha got up after a short time, and endeavoured to proceed on her journey. But she was manifestly in a less fit state to do so than before she had rested, for she walked much less steadily, and had not gone many yards before she nearly fell into a ditch by her side. She then crossed to the opposite side of the road and endeavoured to save herself from falling as she walked by supporting herself with one hand against the wall of the grounds in which the lady already spoken of sat sketching. It was an ornamental wall built of whitish bricks, and, consequently, powerfully reflected the fierce rays of the afternoon sun to which it was exposed. The unhappy girl had proceeded but a very little way in this manner when it became evident that the terrific heat was rapidly overpowering her. In her failing strength, not finding sufficient support by leaning one hand against the wall, she placed her two hands against it and moved along sideways, with her face towards the wall, unable to raise her trembling legs, but dragging them wearily one after the other. Seeing that it was manifestly impossible that she should

continue her journey, Arthur ran downstairs and out of the house in order to fetch her back, taking his umbrella to protect her from the sun.

As he commenced running towards her, he saw that she had managed to pass the oak gates at the principal entrance to the Gothic villa's grounds, and to reach to within a few paces of the end of the wall. Here she paused, seemingly powerless to proceed further, and then after a few moments, as if she found her position, with the fierce heat smiting the back of her uncovered neck, unendurable, she swung herself round and faced the sun, leaning her back against the wall, while her trembling knees bent beneath her. It was a sight to move to compassion the hardest heart. Arthur was not near enough to see the unhappy girl's pitiful, beseeching, half-blinded eyes, but as pictured by his frenzied imagination they gave forth at that moment so agonized, so heartrending an appeal against the cruelty of her fate, that from the lowest depths of his being arose the passionate cry, "O God, dost Thou see *them*?" It was revolting to his moral nature—it made him quiver with indignation as he ran, to behold the sun (so it seemed to him in his excitement) thus prostituting his tremendous force—to see him exerting it to make earth a burning hell to a feeble creature already half-perishing from the terrors of Sinai's awful lightnings.

The energy that springs from despair enabled the ill-fated girl to turn and make a last effort to continue on her way, and she succeeded in creeping the short distance that brought her to the end of the wall. There another road entered the one along which she was going, so that all means for her to sustain herself suddenly ceased. Suffering from one of her attacks of nervous, total blindness, she did not see this, but passed beyond the wall, and finding no support to her outstretched hands, staggered about, fumbled perplexedly in the air, and then, utterly unable to stand long without support, fell to the ground.

On coming up to her Arthur found her quite insensible. He took her up in his arms, and, carrying her to the opposite side of the road, placed her on a grassy bank that was shaded by a hawthorn-tree. He looked around to see if there was any house near where he might procure some water to sprinkle Rotha's face with, but there was only the villa in whose grounds the lady was sketching. This villa was newly built, and, as Arthur had heard at Daisy Cottage, was not yet inhabited; he therefore thought the best course to pursue would be to apply to the lady-artist that he had seen from his window; she might have some smelling-salts with her, or know what to do better than he did. Running to the carriage entrance-gates of the grounds attached to the villa, he

found the door for foot passengers at the side of them unfastened, and entering, discovered the lady sketching to be Miss Brown. He had seen her the previous day while he was minding her father's office at Reading, and she had then remembered him directly as one of the guests at Miss Andrews's wedding. Her back being towards Daisy Cottage as he had just seen her from his window, he had not recognised her. Directly that Arthur had explained to her what had occurred, she accompanied him to the side of the fainting girl. Fortunately she had a bottle of smelling-salts with her. After the use of these for a few minutes, Rotha gave some indications of revival.

"I wish," said Arthur, "we had some water to sprinkle her face with."

"How stupid of me to have left my bag in the garden!" exclaimed Miss Brown. "I did not drink near all the wine-and-water I brought to take at my luncheon—the flask must be more than half-full still; perhaps you wouldn't mind fetching my bag."

Arthur of course did as he was asked as quickly as possible. A portion of the sherry-and-water in Miss Brown's picnic flask was soon dashed on Rotha's face, with very beneficial effect.

"Perhaps," Arthur suggested, "it might do her good to pour a little of the wine-and-water down her throat, as I fear, from something that I have just

heard accidentally, that she has not had any food since yesterday morning, and so is exhausted from want of nourishment."

"Poor little thing! she looks half-starved," said Miss Brown, pityingly, at the same time pouring some sherry-and-water down Rotha's throat.

The face of the fainting girl became less corpse-like, and soon the light of consciousness was seen again in her eyes. Miss Brown gave her some more wine-and-water, and then producing a soft biscuit from her bag, made Rotha eat it as soon as she was sufficiently recovered to do so.

After having, as she thought, rested long enough, and expressed her great concern for having given so much trouble, Rotha wished to go on her way in discharge of the errand on which her aunt had sent her. Miss Brown and Arthur protested against this; but to satisfy her of her unfitness to do as she wished, they permitted her to stand up and try and walk by herself. Giddiness and weakness so palpably unfitted her to do this that she was obliged to renounce her intention, and to agree that Arthur should conduct her home. Miss Brown had to look after her sketching apparatus, and to lock the door in the wall of the villa's grounds, and so left them; but she promised to call at Daisy Cottage, in passing on her return to Reading, to see if she could be of any further service.

"Where was it that you were going?" asked Arthur, pretending that he did not know, as Rotha walked very slowly by his side, grasping tightly and leaning upon his arm.

"To the baker's—aunt hasn't got any bread for tea," answered Rotha, despondingly.

"But there's mine: you can take some of that. You're quite welcome to help yourself to my bread-and-butter at any time."

"Thank you, sir."

"And not only do I give you permission to do so, but I wish you to do so whenever you feel hungry and your aunt's supply runs short. From what you said to me this morning I begin to hope that if you have a sufficient supply of food, that, in conjunction with the country air, will make you strong and well. So eat away whenever you like at my bread-and-butter, and however large the quantity you may consume, I promise you that I will not complain. Tell me if I walk too fast for you."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Howard; I'm beginning to feel a good deal better now."

But Rotha was still rather too poorly to talk without unpleasant effort. Arthur perceived this, and so supported her home the rest of the way in silence. His state of feeling as he did so was quite the opposite to that condition of frenzied indignation in which he

had gone to her aid. The frightful spectacle of unconscious brute force frustrating the benevolent intention of Supreme Goodness was no longer present to his mind. That benevolent intention that he believed he often saw struggling hopelessly in Nature he now felt triumphing, at one point, through himself. Momentarily surrendered as an organ of Divine compassion, his heart was filled with the purest joy.

CHAPTER VII.

A YOUNG LADY'S CONFESSION.

On arriving at Daisy Cottage, after having explained to Mrs. Hogg what had occurred, Arthur persuaded Rotha to lie down. He was then about to go upstairs, when Miss Brown arrived. She remained a short time sitting by Rotha's side, making kind inquiries—gave her half-a-crown—talked for a while to Mrs. Hogg about the weakly condition of her niece, and then rose to go. Arthur naturally offered to carry her sketching apparatus and camp-stool home for her. She smilingly accepted his offer, and at the same time congratulated him upon the place of abode that he had selected. Her father, she told him, was negotiating for the purchase of a plot of land immediately adjoining the garden of Daisy Cottage, as a site for an ornamental villa to be built after a design of her own.

“Oh, indeed!” said Arthur. “Well, I don't think that you could find a prettier spot near Reading. I have had the pleasure, I believe, of seeing a drawing of your proposed villa hanging in your papa's office?”

"Yes, there is one sketch of it there."

"Your design, it must be admitted, has the rare merit of great originality."

"I am glad that you think so, for originality was what I aimed at in making the design."

"And you have unquestionably perfectly succeeded. By the way, you might perhaps like to judge as to what sort of view you would have from the upper front windows of your villa, if built in this spot. If so, you could not do better than take a look from the window of the sitting-room just over the room we are in. The staircase unfortunately, though, is an awkward one for a lady."

"Thank you, I *should* like to go up and look just for a minute or two. I don't mind about the staircase. Living in the country, I'm used to scrambling over stiles and five-barred gates. I have no doubt that I'm a better climber than you are, though I'm a woman."

Miss Brown then went upstairs, accompanied by Arthur, and looked out upon the country from his sitting-room window.

"Oh, it is lovely!" she exclaimed. Then, after a brief silence, she added, "But I can't stay to feast my eyes longer. Papa has one or two friends coming to dine with him at half-past six, and I must get home and dress."

As on turning from the window she passed by the Pembroke table, that did duty as a centre table, she happened to see on it Mr. Darwin's "Descent of Man," that Arthur had thrown there when he ran to the aid of Rotha. Miss Brown took up the book, looked at it, and then said with a significant look—

"If you read here such works as this, Mr. Howard, I should recommend you not to let them lie about for *every one* to see."

"Why not, may I ask?"

"It might lead to unpleasant consequences."

"I am at a loss to understand you."

"Ah! you don't know how particular it is necessary to be in Reading and its neighbourhood. There was a grocer in the town who read the 'Descent of Man,' and on its becoming known to the members of the Association of Young *Reading* Christians, what do you think they did?"

"I'm sure I can't tell; provincial pettiness allied to narrow-minded fanaticism is capable of anything."

"They denounced him as an atheist, and induced so many of the pious single ladies of Reading—amongst whom his Bohea was celebrated—to withdraw their custom, that he was ultimately ruined."

"It is then, indeed, necessary to be particular here. Really it is a great piece of impudence for the conceited young nonentities of a country town to set

themselves up as a sort of inquisition to judge the Galileos of the age. Puffed up by the immense popularity of the biscuits of Reading, have they imagined that its bigotry would be swallowed by the world also?"

"You need not be alarmed," said Miss Brown, soothingly, "because I have seen that book. I don't sympathise with the young *Reading* Christians. I should like very much to read Mr. Darwin's books myself, but that would not be safe for me to do at Reading, and when I have been staying in London something or other has always prevented me. But once when staying there some years ago I——" She hesitated for a moment, as if afraid that some familiar of the local inquisition might be concealed up the chimney, and then added in a very subdued voice, "I read the 'Vestiges of Creation.'"

Arthur, to the young lady's manifest disappointment, did not look shocked, or even surprised, at her confession of having read that once celebrated book. As she seemed waiting for him to speak, and he knew hardly what to say, he remarked—

"It is very nicely written—don't you think so?"

"Very—I liked it *so* much. But though I have not been able to read the 'Descent of Man,' I have of course heard and read a great deal about it one way and another; and though perhaps you will think it

very dreadful, I——” Miss Brown abruptly stopped speaking. After a pause, she, looking very serious, said, “You will please understand, Mr. Howard, that I am talking to you in confidence—most particularly, what I am about to tell you must go no further——”

“Oh, certainly not,” interrupted Arthur.

“If you were to mention it to anybody in Reading you might do me an injury.”

“Miss Brown,” replied Arthur, with assumed earnestness, “whatever statement you may think proper to make to me confidentially, I promise you shall be guarded with the secrecy of the confessional.” He then adjusted his features to an expression of severe gravity, and inclined his right ear towards the mouth of Miss Brown, who thereupon ventured to whisper—

“I am convinced our progenitors *were* apes.”

It was fortunate for Arthur that the lower part of his face was covered by his beard and moustache, otherwise the twitching of his lips, caused by the efforts he made not to laugh, would have been seen. As for his eyes, he never laughed with them—they were changelessly melancholy. It was with difficulty that, after a moment or two, he managed to say, gravely—

“Certainly there are many points in which men and monkeys are very much alike, both in their forms as well as in their habits.”

"Very many," rejoined Miss Brown; "but there is one remarkable particular in which they differ that greatly puzzles me. It is this—the ape, like other members of the brute creation, blindly obeys its instincts and propensities, and it's all right; but if we more highly developed apes do the same, it's all wrong."

"Let me understand you. As regards the fulfilment of the laws of his nature, you find the position of man on the earth, when contrasted with that of his fellow-animals, as something quite exceptional, and you are at a loss for an explanation of this?"

"Precisely so."

"But may not the cause of man's position being thus exceptional be found in the fact that the last stage of the development of the brute into man—that is to say, the special alteration made in the monkey in order to make a man of him—was highly exceptional also? In man a tail has been lost and a soul gained. Naturally some very exceptional consequence must ensue from so very exceptional a metamorphosis."

"Ah! I never thought of that."

"It throws quite a new light upon the subject, does it not?"

"It does indeed. But I wish it could be explained by what stages of progressive development the meta-

morphosis has been brought about. Without knowing at least a few of the intermediate links in the chain of evolution connecting two things so different, one finds it *almost* inconceivable that there can be any direct relation between them."

"There is only one way of getting over the difficulty. The transformation being to us inconceivable, we may suppose that Nature to effect it took a period of time so vast as to be also inconceivable—in short, a period of time adequate for such a purpose."

"Myriads of ages?"

"Well, I *think* I should prefer to say countless æons of time."

Miss Brown looked at her watch rather anxiously, and then said, "But I really must start at once for home, or I shall not have time to dress before half-past six."

"I'm ready to accompany you this instant. It will be necessary, if you please, to be very careful in going down the stairs; they're so very steep for a lady."

"Thank you—I'll be careful. Now mind, Mr. Howard, that you don't forget your promise to keep secret what I have told you. Should it become known in this neighbourhood that I entertain the opinions I have stated to you, I, like the grocer of whom I have just spoken, might be branded as an atheist. They are very fond of applying that epithet here to persons whose tastes are at all philosophical."

"As an excuse, I presume, for indulging in the spiteful amusement of damning their souls."

"It's quite shocking, and as unreasonable as it is cruel," said Miss Brown, warmly. "As truth cannot be opposed to truth, true science cannot be the enemy of true religion. By the proper study of Nature we learn to look up to Nature's God, and to discern the providential arrangement that 'all partial evil is but universal good.'"

"And," rejoined Arthur, "that, in the words of the great Gallican divine, 'Tous les événements sont enchaînés dans le meilleur des mondes possible,' and that 'tout étant fait pour une fin, tout est nécessairement pour la meilleure fin.'"

"*Nasey-par?*" said Miss Brown, who had commenced to go downstairs. But in her anxiety to let Arthur know that she also spoke French, she forgot to look how she stepped, and stumbling, would have fallen, had he not fortunately been close at hand to save her.

To his great amusement she made no objection to the words of Dr. Pangloss being referred to as those of a Gallican divine. Arthur was led into so making fun of her from suspiciously fancying that she had seized the opportunity to foist upon him, as if made expressly for him, some common-place ready-made phrases that she kept in stock.

When they had got outside the cottage, and were fairly started on their walk to Reading, Miss Brown remarked, "There are some people who think our sex ought not to trouble themselves about scientific or philosophical subjects—I don't know whether you are amongst their number?"

"No, certainly not. Supposing, for instance, a girl shows a great capacity for mathematics, I don't see why she should be forbidden to cultivate her peculiar talent simply because it is one more often possessed by boys."

"But do you think that those of our sex who interest themselves in questions that have hitherto been regarded as suitable for men alone to study, necessarily risk the loss of those feminine graces that poets and people of sentiment generally so much admire?"

"I see no necessity why they should do so, nor why they should not still merit, in the language of poets, to be called angels—for there is more than one kind of angel. There is the intellectual cherub as well as the loving seraph. To me, ladies who take to studying mathematics, physics, evolutionary materialism, or any other branch of philosophy, are angels still, only they belong to the cherubic order instead of the seraphic."

"I am very pleased to hear you say so. It is

so delightful to meet with a sympathetic spirit. We poor women are only beginning to have a fair chance in the world. Hitherto we have been kept under by superior brute force. Emancipated from so degrading a tyranny and treated justly, I sometimes fancy that in times to come, women, while retaining all that is specially excellent about them *as* women, will show themselves capable of even transcending men both in philosophy and science as well as in literature and art."

"Ah! I see you don't quite agree with Professor Clifford, then. He, reading the signs of the times, prophesies that the Kingdom of Man is at hand; you would rather wish me to believe that the Kingdom of Woman is at hand. But, seriously, do you regard it as probable that the great women yet to come may even excel the Platos, Newtons, Shakespeares, Raphaels, and Mozarts already produced by our sex?"

"Well, I was telling you what I sometimes fancy might be in the future. I wanted, you know, to elicit your views upon the subject."

"Just so. Let me suggest to you that perhaps you have not duly considered an immutable arrangement of Nature, having an important bearing on this question. It is that the sacred sufferings and duties of maternity fall to the lot of most women, upon whom

is consequently imposed the cruel necessity of making great sacrifices in the way of their intellectual development. As the bosom friends of babies and young children, they are forced to live very much in a mental world of simple and elementary ideas. Can they, while sympathetically keeping their minds on a level with those of young children, be soaring at the same time in the higher spheres of thought, exercising their intellectual wings? How, then, are they to acquire, to the same extent as men, the accumulated lofty mental experiences required to develop originators of great ideas? It would seem inevitable that so long as most women are fated to be the mothers of 'little dears,' it must be left to men mostly to give birth to ideas—or at least to ideas of the highest order of originality."

"Well, some modern women have already attained a very high order of excellence in literature and art. But to revert to what we were saying about women who take to studying science—to those whom you poetically termed angels of the cherubic order. Do you not think that, owing to the peculiar constitution of the female mind, special good may perhaps, in some way, result from a few women profoundly studying the physical sciences?"

"You mean that the interests of truth may be served by scientific knowledge being contemplated

from a feminine as well as a masculine point of view?"

"Yes. I cannot help believing that somehow, in the way of correcting the one-sidedness of the conclusions of modern men-philosophers, scientific women have a mission to fulfil."

"Very probably they have. We are living under the tyranny of physical science. Its professors are too ruthlessly iconoclastic to tolerate even an altar to the Unknown God. None of them have yet discovered that there *is* any God to know. But it is only men that they are alienating from religion; the worshipping instinct is too strong for them in women. While men are fast abandoning Christianity as an expiring thing, women exhibit that brave tenacity of devotion to it that they did of old to its crucified Founder.

" 'Not she with trait'rous kiss her Saviour stung,
Not she denied Him with unholy tongue;
She, while apostles shrank, could danger brave,
Last at His cross and earliest at His grave.' "

Thus a divorce is threatened between the male and female minds of educated mankind. To avert this threatened divorce would be a sufficiently grand mission for modern scientific women to accomplish, would it not? And for it they possess some special qualifications. Their acquaintance with science must

fit them to comprehend the scepticism of men; their possession of the intuitions of their own sex must enable them to sympathise with the fidelity to religion of women. To each they can impartially extend a friendly hand that may help to smooth the difficulties to a reconciliation. Let them do so, and then, that amongst their earthly angels a little band should belong to the cherubic order, must please even poets themselves."

Just as Arthur finished these words they reached a stile, consisting simply of wood bars, without any stepping-boards. This they had to get over, that they might take a footpath across some fields, which was a much shorter way to the town than by the road. Having put the sketching apparatus and camp-stool that he was carrying through the bars of the stile on to the ground on the other side of it, Arthur climbed over and offered his hand to Miss Brown, to aid her in doing the same. This he did as a matter of course, but not feeling at all certain that she would condescend to accept any assistance. He thought she would probably take the opportunity of trying to astonish the eyes of a cockney by making a display of that proficiency in getting over stiles of which she had boastfully spoken in their conversation at Daisy Cottage. She, however, took his hand without hesitation, but evidently thought an explanation required,

for as she stepped down on to the footpath in the field, she said—

“The top bar of the stile is dirty, and I did not like to touch it, lest I should soil my gloves.”

“That would have been a pity, they’re so very pretty.”

“Yes; but, unfortunately, they get dirty very easily.”

They were of delicate rose-coloured kid, and fitted her small hands to such perfection, that Arthur felt sure it must have taken her ten minutes at least to have put them on.

“I should think you must find it difficult to get gloves of a size small enough for your hands,” he said, as he regarded them admiringly.

“I always take small sixes.”

“Do you indeed? I must confess I find something excessively pleasing in the sight of small hands, but it is a singular fact that they seem to me even prettier well-gloved than when uncovered.”

“How do you account for the gloves having that effect upon your mind?”

“I suppose it must be because, as Emerson says, ‘with the real is sorrow, but with the ideal is joy.’ The gloves supply, as it were, graceful models of beautiful little hands, and the excited fancy brilliantly portrays originals worthy of being the absolutely faultless hands of a goddess of beauty.”

"I must take care to always have gloves on when I'm in your company," said Miss Brown, laughing.

"Not always. Let me sometimes admire your face without distraction."

"But I'm sure *it* is not to be idealised into the face of a Venus. You have to content yourself with bare reality there."

"No; I see much more than *bare* reality there; I see inspiring reality. It is their expression, varying like the play of spiritual light, that gives your features their charm. Gracefully they ever partly veil and partly disclose a Psyche that incites to a nobler worship than that of merely sensuous beauty."

"Thank you. And is it only in mentally painting the artist that you amuse yourself, or do you draw, or paint?"

"No, I do neither; but I take a great interest in paintings. I need hardly tell you that, to some extent, it is in the way of business that I have been led to do so. In making catalogues and inventories there are often pictures to be described. To do this sufficiently well I found some little study of painting necessary; and with me, to study a subject is to get interested in it."

"And with me also. It is water-colour drawing that I have principally studied. I make all papa's sketches of country villas and mansions that he has to let or to sell."

"You were engaged making a sketch of that villa for your papa when I interrupted you, I presume?"

"Yes. But I think that we must walk a little faster; I'm so afraid that I shall not have time enough to dress before dinner." So saying, Miss Brown started off at a pace that made conversation impracticable, and soon brought her and her companion to her father's house.

Having nothing to detain him there, Arthur immediately took leave of Miss Brown and turned his steps homewards. The forced march upon Reading in which he had just taken part had made him excessively hot, so in order to cool himself he sauntered along at his ease, indulging in that ever-changing dream-like thought that, with him, the motion of gentle walking seemed to supply a nervous stimulus just sufficient to encourage, more particularly in the tranquillity of the country. On this occasion his reflections were naturally influenced by the impressions still lingering on his mind from his recent talk with Miss Brown. Thinking upon the great changes taking place in the social position of women, led him, as one form of its manifestation, to meditate upon that general social revolution which is going on in the world. Old-fashioned conventionalities trampled upon, antiquated forms of moral restraint tolerated but with impatience, if not actually broken loose from—what did all this portend?

"Revolutions," he reflected, "are said to be attempted returns to more natural states of things. To what more natural state of things is it that the great modern social revolution tends? Coincident with a philosophy that glories in proclaiming that man's progenitors were beasts, will it, when further advanced, seek to conduct him back to the condition of his progenitors? Is it destined to ultimately restore to him that primitive unshackled liberty that is still enjoyed by his nearly related tribes of the chimpanzees, the ourangs, and the gorillas?" A ludicrous panorama of all that he had ever seen or read of monkeys and their habits here presented itself to Arthur's imagination, and he laughed aloud.

While he was thus mirthful, the smiling tranquillity around him was broken by the horrid screaming and snorting of an engine on the railway hard by. He ceased to laugh both muscularly and mentally. That engine, thus disagreeably disturbing him, gave to his irritated mind the idea of some monstrous brute tearing ruthlessly and triumphantly on its path of cruel devastation. This gloomy fancy continued to haunt him when he resumed his reflections, and influenced the form they took. "Modern humanity," he said mentally, "with its diseased hunger for novelty, its quenchless thirst for excitement, its vague, limitless desires, the more than magical powers it possesses

from having wrested from matter so many baleful secrets, would, if delivered over to unregulated animal impulses, be as—what? What figurative representation can adequately portray so frightful a phenomenon? An Indian express dashing backwards through the jungle by night, its engine-driver being devoured by a man-eating tiger! The red lamps on that reversed express would be danger signals indeed—the bloodshot eyes of a monster without either reason or instinct to control it. The hyæna's laugh and lion's roar would become as little terrifying as the bleating of sheep at the horror-striking thundering of its mad, resistless rush."

The vividness of his mental picture caused him to become oblivious to the subject it was designed to illustrate; his metaphorical express train ran away with *his* train of thought. Seeking to catch it and not succeeding, he contented himself as he loitered along with languidly watching the varied cloud-like thoughts that spontaneously shaped themselves in his mind, floated in it for a little while, and then melted away. Presently, in crossing a field, coming upon an inviting spot, he laid himself out at full length on the soft grass, and basked drowsily in the sunshine like a dog—"thinking of nothing."

CHAPTER VIII.

A RHAPSODY ON A NOSE.

THE permission that Arthur gave her to eat as much bread-and-butter at his expense as she liked was at first acted upon by Rotha with timid moderation. Gradually, however, she became bolder; Arthur making no remark, but treating it as a matter of course that those articles of food should go with him more quickly than before. And as with Rotha "increase of appetite grew by what it fed upon," Arthur, after he had been at Daisy Cottage for a month or so, found himself paying every week for a consumption of cottage loaves and fresh butter that made him marvel at Rotha's extraordinarily good appetite. Very soon the effects of an unlimited supply of plain and wholesome nourishment upon the constitution of the poor girl showed themselves in a way that dissipated any doubts her previous appearance had inspired Arthur with as to the salubrity of the position of Daisy Cottage. In a few months a wonderful transformation had been accomplished in her, and she had attained to a state of health fairly good for a girl of a

naturally rather delicate organisation. And not only had she become as pretty as Arthur's imagination, when he first saw her, had painted her as likely to be if in better health, but she had become very much prettier. Her red hair, no doubt, did not please the taste of many people: no one, however, could deny that she had a sweetly pretty face.

But though to Arthur was given the pleasure of seeing a previously pining fellow-creature attain in a few months, through his instrumentality, the inestimable blessing of health, the expiration of the same few months brought him no such happy experience in his own person. This was the more disappointing because it seemed to him, on looking back, that all the conditions likely to have helped him to at least some measure of health had been fulfilled. He had, soon after coming to live at Daisy Cottage, drawn up strict rules for his observance in regard to diet, exercise, bathing, &c., and had rigidly regulated his life in accordance with those rules. Then the circumstances of his life generally had been of a cheering kind, and so calculated to influence his mind in a way favourable to health. He had had just about as much business to attend to as was agreeable to him. He had had, through Mr. Brown, great good luck in investing a considerable portion of his money—about four thousand pounds, that had hitherto been in

Consols—in small houses at Reading. Mr. Brown fully expected that he would get ten per cent. on these investments. He had been treated by Miss Brown as “a sympathetic spirit, with whom she delighted to commune,” and he had been in the habit of having frequent amusing conversations with her as opportunity offered. He had found very agreeable occupation for many hours at home in giving Rotha lessons in writing and other things, in which he had found her education to have been much neglected. And yet, notwithstanding the genial influence that being so smiled upon by Fortune, combined with the pleasing sense of feeling himself of some little use in the world, was calculated to exert upon his secretions, and notwithstanding that there was not the slightest evidence of his suffering in any way from structural disease, nourishing food had obstinately refused to nourish him, and he continued to be, as of old, almost a living skeleton. This made him profoundly discontented and miserable. He felt utterly weary of conforming to rigid dietetic rules—of denying himself all sorts of nice things because they were esteemed by writers on “the stomach and its difficulties” as pernicious to the dyspeptic. He chafed at the disagreeable sacrifice of liberty that the faithful keeping of such rules involved, seeing that nothing to compensate him resulted from it.

A temptation accidentally thrown in his way caused him to break out in open rebellion against his self-imposed dietetic tyranny. Mr. Brown, at the approach of the great annual English festival for stuffing, having had more presents of turkeys and geese from country friends than he knew what to do with, gave Arthur a fine fat goose one morning that he called upon him. Arthur had merely called upon Mr. Brown that morning to know whether he was in want of his services, and finding he was not, he, having no other business to transact in Reading, at once started for home with his goose. On his way, after debating in his mind the best thing to do with it, whether he should make it a present to some one or keep it himself, he at length decided that he would have it for dinner himself on Christmas Day, and invite his landlady and her niece to help him eat it. The words of great authorities that he had read upon the diet of the dyspeptic rose up in his mind in protest against his eating roast goose or Christmas pudding either. In vain. He now felt thoroughly sick of his digestible but monotonous dinners, and he craved for something that was indigestible and savoury by way of a change. No medical authority, however great, he resolved, should stand in the way of his keeping the great feast which was at hand in a thoroughly orthodox English fashion.

When he reached home that morning, he found Rotha decorating his sitting-room with christmas and holly. She had a good many little things to do the next day, she said, and the day after was Christmas Day, so she was taking the opportunity, while she had a little leisure, and he (Mr. Howard) was out, to decorate his room. Arthur expressed himself as extremely pleased with what she had already done.

"I haven't much more to do," said Rotha; "but if you're hungry I won't stay to finish now, but will go and cook your chop at once."

"No, don't do that," said Arthur; "I'm too tired to eat my dinner just at present. It's very bad, you know, to take a full meal when the body's in an exhausted state. Carrying this great parcel from Reading has temporarily quite knocked me up: you just feel the weight of it."

Rotha took the parcel and felt the weight of it with both her hands. "It is heavy, indeed," she said.

"I don't believe I should have been more fatigued if I had carried a fat baby from Reading. I never before so fully realised how great a blessing perambulators must be to nursemaids," continued Arthur, undoing the parcel and displaying the goose to Rotha. "It's a present to me from Mr. Brown, so I mean to have it for my Christmas dinner, and I want you and

your aunt to dine with me on that day, and help me eat this goose, or I shall never get through it."

"Oh, thank you," answered Rotha, very much pleased at finding that she would not have to dine alone with her aunt on Christmas Day, but was to have the company of Mr. Howard also, and so a probably merry time of it, for Arthur, in her estimation, was "so funny." He somehow inspired her with ridiculous reminiscences of the pantaloon that she had once seen in a pantomime in London, when she was a child — before she became a Methodist. From this cause it was that sometimes when Arthur merely looked at her, without speaking a word, she could not help laughing. On one of these occasions, when a doleful adjustment of Arthur's features had tickled her fancy as being quite exceptionally ludicrous, she had laughed so much as to excite Arthur's curiosity to know the cause, and he then managed to make her confess it to him. Upon hearing it, he told her that he *was* merely a pantaloon, playing in the pantomime of human life, and that mischievous Fate was the clown that was knocking him about.

While Rotha was busy examining the goose, Arthur flung himself down upon the old sofa, or rather sofa-bedstead, that stood against the wall opposite the window. He felt temporarily quite exhausted.

Rotha, after having looked at the goose to her

heart's content, said, "Then if you don't mind, Mr. Howard, I'll just finish putting up the christmas and holly. I sha'n't be many minutes. I've only got to stick some about the looking-glass and chimney ornaments."

"Yes, pray do so; only you'll please excuse me offering to help you, as I'm so tired."

"O yes; I'd rather finish it all myself."

Rotha then proceeded to stick little bits of holly and christmas at the sides of the chimney-glass and in and about the so-called chimney ornaments. These consisted of three rather large shells—one of which, the one with its surface like mother-o'-pearl, was broken—and of two small china vases (not a pair), one of which was conspicuously mended, and the other imperfect at the top. As for the small oblong chimney-glass, that, without exaggeration, might be described as verging upon a state of oldness that would almost justify it being described as antique. Manifestly it had been manufactured when glass was very dear, for notwithstanding its diminutive size it had three plates, a small one and two smaller; and as for the gilding on its frame, there was not much of that left, and what there was, was turning black.

"What are you looking at me so hard for, Mr. Howard?" asked Rotha, as she chanced to notice that Arthur had his eyes fixed upon the reflection of her

face in the looking-glass. "Is there anything unusual about my appearance just now?"

"No," replied Arthur; "I was only thinking that your 'lunatic fringe' is a great improvement to your face, and that you have just succeeded in getting it into nice order for Christmas."

"I'm glad that you like it. Several people have told me they think it is an improvement to my face."

"There's no doubt about it: the way that you used to wear your hair in front made you look so barefaced."

Rotha laughed. Her pretty little mouth, as then exhibited open, appealed excitingly to Arthur's fancy. He mentally compared it to some flower opened to the morning sun, the rich colour of which was heightened by its being bathed with glistening dew. For those lips that when Arthur first knew their owner were pale, pursed-up, and dry, had undergone a delightful transformation. They now displayed themselves through a brilliant glaze of crystalline fluid glowing ruby-red. The merry sparkle in her laughing eyes, too, contrasted strongly with that hopelessness they formerly expressed, the remembrance of which was indelibly impressed upon Arthur's memory. And her cheeks, as she laughed, gratified Arthur's eyes by becoming, not quite blooming red roses, it is true, but of a more glowing colour than before. For just before, though not the least sickly-looking, they had had but the

delicate pink hue of the maiden-blush rose, that being the ordinary appearance that they presented in her now improved state of health. It had just struck Arthur, before she laughed, that if he could have held a maiden-blush rose against one of her cheeks, the fanciful conceit might have been 'indulged in that Nature had used but one brush of paint to adorn them both, if only Rotha's face had been free from freckles—but hers were *permanent* freckles, alas! Her colour, heightened from pleased excitement, made the freckles less conspicuous, but did not altogether conceal them. They prevented Arthur from regarding her cheeks with unalloyed delight, so he suffered his eyes to wander from them, and to rest upon that central beauty of her face that, now that it was no longer "pinched," and was no longer of a faint yellow tint, seemed to him the very perfection of noses. There was not a single freckle, at present, upon it, thank Heaven. Lolling back upon the sofa, and contemplating the matchless form and delicately soft pinky hue of that divine little nose with worshipping eyes—his soul tasting a delicious sweetness—he silently soliloquised thus:—

"Such a nose, though it might be dreamed of by some great artist in one of his most exalted moods of inspiration, would yet defy him, however great his genius, to adequately pourtray its beauty. For it

could only be rigidly portrayed by him as seen at one particular moment, and it, to be artistically appreciated, pre-eminently requires to be presented to the mind as it is to be seen, under favouring circumstances, in a succession of moments. It requires that its exquisitely delicately-cut, transparent nostrils should be represented as they are sometimes to be seen, quivering with varied subtle undulations in sympathetic harmony with some beautiful passing emotion of her soul. These special manifestations of her nose in time are of the very essence of its beauty. It is alone through these successive vibratory appearances flashing upon my eyes so rapidly as to seem to have an unbroken unity, and getting their respective impressions recorded on my mind as an æsthetic totality, that gives me the truest attainable idea of what that ineffable little nose really is. With it thus vividly present to my imagination, how mockingly insufficient does all poetry, with which I am familiar, in which the noses of beauteous women are praised appear—not excepting even that of the Song of Songs—to express the emotion that fills my soul! ‘Thy nose,’ says the writer of the wondrous love-poem that has immortalised the charms of the fair Shulamite, ‘thy nose is as the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus.’ But, however marvellous the beauty of the tower of Lebanon may be supposed to

have been, the idea of *rigidity* is necessarily associated in the mind with the conception of a tower. It requires a beautiful poetical image that seems to live and move to reveal in words, that is, to give appropriate artistic expression to, the exalted state of feeling with which Rotha's nose, as displayed in its higher moments, inspires me. After contemplating it as a sensitive instrument, making visible the music of her soul, the nose even of the most beautiful goddess in marble compared with it becomes, to my mind, relatively but as a mere bit of confectionery, having no other than a sugary sweetness. I gaze upon the icy statue's nose only to long once more to contemplate the sensitive nostrils, whose finely-attuned fibres, undulatingly agitated by the play of the breath of life, cause my mind, through my eyes, to hear 'Æolian modulations.' And as for all the other *fleshly* noses that I am doomed to behold around me, how contemptible do they all appear after Rotha's! Nature, I think, regarded as a maker of human noses, shows a want of taste, and a poverty of inventive imagination, strangely at variance with her creative feats in the way of mouths and eyes. Again and again I have met with enchanting ruby lips differing from any that I had ever seen before, that caused a soft, voluptuous feeling to steal over my senses, such as the combined influence of the perfume of roses and lullaby music

would be likely to inspire. Again and again my own eyes have met fresh pairs of sweet eyes of heavenly blue, each pair having a heavenly look peculiar to themselves, that have gently dissolved, by their melting radiance, the ice around my heart, and filled it with joy as pure and warm as when I used, in other days, to look up at the bright blue sky and dream that I saw heavenly love shining through it. But during the thirty weary years that I have sojourned upon this planet, out of all the vast multitude of noses that poking about the world have obtruded themselves upon my attention, I do not remember any, Rotha's excepted, but such as only escaped insignificance by being either laughable or repulsive. Nature, it would appear, occasionally in a freakish humour models a humanised beak or snout, but would seem to cast wholesale the dreary majority of her noses in old and worn-out moulds. Hence it comes that these have no form in particular, and that their smudgingly-blurred outlines remind one of dogmas as defined by Broad Churchmen. But in Rotha's nose Nature appears with overwhelming success to the æsthetic part of my nature. That matchless little nose is indeed a living embodiment of that ravishing vision of a perfect nose that has hitherto ever haunted my mind but to be esteemed as a lovely creation of my imagination, impossible of realisation upon earth. I will never talk

again about the intractability of matter. I see now that its molecules are capable of more exquisite refinement of adjustment than I had dreamed of in my philosophy; I see them actually built up and shaped into a nose that fills me with adoring wonder."

He had just reached this point in his contemplation, when Rotha drew back a little from the fireplace, in order to see better the total effect of the Christmas decorations there that she had now completed. She put her head a little on one side, like a bird, to look at them, and then smiled complacently.

"*There!*" she exclaimed, stretching out her arms with opened hands, and turning her head and looking at Arthur in a pleased manner.

"Very pretty—very pretty indeed," he said, warmly.

"Now, I'll go and cook your chop; I'm sure you must want your dinner."

"Well, I should be glad of it now I have rested a bit. Take the goose with you and put it in a cool place."

"O yes." And smiling brightly and looking altogether as if she was very much pleased, Rotha took up the big and weighty bird, and hugging it in a way that almost made Arthur wish that he was the goose and the goose himself, she left the room.

Arthur could not help envying her. She was manifestly looking forward to dining off roast goose with a

delight unalloyed by any fear of digestive sufferings afterwards. "Would that it was permitted to me to do the same!" he mentally exclaimed. "Would that I did not foresee that that goose is destined to cause me to empty the box of antibilious pills that stands on my bedroom mantelshelf! 'Does there not radiate forth from this animal (the goose), together with the wisdom and omnipotence of the Creator, His love also?' asks an old religious writer, in a work written to show that benevolent design is manifest throughout Nature and that all things were made for man. The religious optimism of that author is evidently that of *Rotha* also, and I wish that I could see some way of bringing myself to share their happy opinions. But I cannot perceive any. The perversity of my ill-regulated mind is such that it will cling to a pessimist view of the world, even though, in proof of there being intelligent and benevolent purpose in creation, it is made to see that where there are men, not only are there geese, but that there also, for sauce and stuffing, grow apples and sage and onions. Still, some excuse must be made for the perversity of my mind. It can hardly be expected to be altogether content with a world—best though it be of all *possible* worlds—in which though such stupid minds as those of geese inhabit bodies revelling in fatness, itself a self-conscious personality, is forced to dwell in a mere skeleton

framework of an animal that Nature, through some blundering, is unable to complete. I am as great a disgrace to my food as Rotha is a credit to hers ! ”

He hereupon fell into a train of reflections upon the wonderful change that in a comparatively short time had been effected in Rotha through her having a sufficient supply of nutritious food. In her case, he thought, he saw a stomach nobly doing its duty, and acting with all other parts of the body in obedience to some incomprehensible unit of power so as to produce one harmonious and beautiful result. “What,” he curiously asked his own mind, “is that mysterious *something* present in Rotha that when I first saw her I found like a bankrupt builder, leaving the edifice he had been constructing falling to ruins, and that when I came to its aid, and freely supplied it with bread as bricks, and butter as mortar, quickly finished building that temple of beauty that now delights my eyes ? What is that adapting invisible presence in her that, upon masses of certain molecules having been brought within the sphere of its power, has caused them to be grouped into a combination, having such an artistically perfect unity of idea as Rotha now displays ? ”

He paused, and sat waiting to see what his mind might spontaneously suggest upon the subject. While thus occupied his dinner was served.

He had eaten but little breakfast, and so, notwith-

standing that he was tired of mutton-chop dinners, the savoury fumes of the chop now served up smoking hot by Rotha so excited his stomach that the cravings of his intellect were no longer heeded. He thought then only of satisfying the cravings of *physical* hunger. Sinking to the level of a mere beast-like bit of "Nature red with tooth and claw," he devoured his portion of sheep's flesh as if he had been a vulture or a tiger. The fierce relish, too, that he displayed as he sopped up its sanguinary steaming gravy with his bread, made him seem almost more cruel than the vulture or the tiger. *They* are content to regale themselves upon the blood of other animals at its natural temperature, *he* plainly delighted in the blood of his victims *hot!*

CHAPTER IX.

DRUNK WITH BEAUTY.

WHEN Mrs. Hogg came home and heard of the invitation of herself and Rotha to dinner with her lodger on Christmas Day, she was almost as pleased as her niece. And her pleasure was added to when, the next day, six bottles of ale and two bottles of gin came for Mr. Howard. For Arthur knew that his landlady regarded beer as an indispensable adjunct of a good dinner, and that she had the same affinity for gin as a goddess has for nectar. As he wished, then, that as far as possible the old woman should enjoy herself at his little dinner-party, he took care to provide the stimulants needed to enable her to do so. And he provided the large quantity of them just mentioned, for that occasion, because he had decided he would then be sociable, and keep Mrs. Hogg company in the imbibation of liquors that she loved, "not wisely but too well." He wished on Christmas Day to put on as cheerful an aspect as he could for the sake of his guests, and he saw in alcoholic stimulation a powerful arti-

ficial means for helping him to realise this wish: as for total abstinence, he felt quite weary of that.

"Christmas Day," he said to himself, while on his way to order the ale and the gin, "Christmas Day without some kind or other of 'wassail bowl' must necessarily be to hosts of people rather a season of sorrow than of joy. It is the chosen day of the year in England for the family 'roll-call' to be made, and naturally brings to the minds of many vividly sad remembrances of loved companion-soldiers, by whose side they once fought in the warfare of life, who now answer the roll-call no more. I am one amongst those hosts of bereaved and hopeless sorrowers to whom Christmas Day is a day profoundly mournful. Is that any reason, however, why, at such a time of general rejoicing, I should permit myself to act like a wet blanket upon any one who, as yet, retains the power of being merry—that I should permit, for example, the melancholy of my own heart to damp the youthful joyousness of Rotha's? The magic potion in life's cup too soon inevitably loses its exhilarating fizzing—too soon becomes a deep and bitter draught with all its joyous bubbles burst. Let me not, then, selfishly play the host to my Christmas guests as funereally as if mutes were at the time standing at the door of Daisy Cottage, when very simple means render such behaviour easily avoidable. Why, even if during the

feast there did happen to be a corpse in the cottage, *that* might be set grinning by galvanism; and those common chemical compounds that force the wretched who yet live into a galvanic gaiety should be swallowed by the mournful at such a time for the benefit of others. Beer and gin-and-water are the wine of ordinary English people; and has not Béranger sung—

“Le vin charme tous les esprits :
 Qu'on le donne
 Par tonne
 Que le vin pleuve dans Paris,
 Pour voir les gens les plus aigris
 Gris'?

And how much greater reason is there for us than for Parisians to have a vinous deluge—particularly at this season of the year? How in dismal, drizzling, dark December in England, without exhilarating stimulants to quicken the rhythmic pulsations of their hearts, and make their blood dance through their arteries and veins, shall soured and sorrow-stricken men and women be able to *rejoice*? Let, then, Bacchanalian ‘joy be unconfined’ at my Christmas feast to-morrow, though towards its close I have to bind up my head with a wet towel to save myself from falling under the table.”

Immediately after this soliloquy Arthur ordered the ale and the gin, the arrival of which brought a thrill of pleasure to the shrivelled heart of his old landlady.

He bought both of the beverages of the strongest kind, as he mischievously intended to try and make Mrs. Hogg thoroughly mellow on Christmas afternoon: he thought that it was very likely she would then become amusing.

The innocent bird that, having fallen into the hands of Arthur, had so demoralised him when served up roasted, on Christmas Day, with sage and onion stuffing, delicious gravy, and apple sauce, caused Mrs. Hogg to be congratulated by her lodger upon having cooked his goose to perfection. Plum-pudding, of course, followed the goose, and dessert afterwards. This last consisted of almonds and raisins and oranges. .

Arthur, recklessly following the example of his landlady, drank freely of beer at dinner and of gin-and-water at dessert; but Rotha abstained from both, being a strict teetotaler. Good cheer and comparatively good health, however, made her sufficiently merry without the help of dangerous stimulants, and she laughed heartily at various remarks made by Arthur that she took to be jokes, but that he meant to be taken seriously. At length, when in talking to her aunt over their dessert, he told her, with a gravity absolutely funereal (for in spite of the gin-and-water he had taken, cruel indigestion made him feel awfully dismal), that he had long given up trying to enjoy

himself, and now contented himself with attempts at minimising the misery of his life, Rotha had such a fit of laughter that she could hardly stop herself, even when she felt that she had already laughed a great deal too much. For a man to say this with such a solemn-looking face, who had just actually eaten two platesful of Christmas pudding, and who had almonds and raisins and an orange on his plate before him, tickled her fancy as being wonderfully funny.

"I wish I could laugh like that," said Arthur to Mrs. Hogg. "I should stand a chance then of getting a little flesh on my bones. Rotha's growing much stouter, is she not?"

"Oh, much stouter, Mr. Howard. The new dress she has on has had to be made much larger than her two old ones."

Rotha had on a new woollen stuff dress, that Arthur had given her as a Christmas present. Miss Brown had kindly chosen and bought the dress for him for that purpose.

"She looks very nice in her new dress," remarked Arthur.

"Yes, she do," answered Mrs. Hogg—"quite a lady."

"That's because the dress is black," said Arthur. "Lots of girls and women might look ladylike, instead of vulgar, if they would only dress in black."

The old woman was not quite prepared to agree to this, so she merely said, "I wish Rotha's hair was black instead of red—I can't a-bear red hair."

"Why so?" asked Arthur. "I like red hair. I have seen many great painters' representations of Venus—who is the Goddess of Beauty, you know—and I never saw one that had black hair."

"But did you ever see one with red hair?" rejoined Rotha.

"Not a Venus; but the hair of the Virgin Mary, who is the Christian Goddess of Beauty, I have often seen in paintings represented as of a decidedly reddish colour."

"Ah! your beauties with reddish hair, or light hair," exclaimed Mrs. Hogg, turning up her nose, "would look insipid things beside a woman with black hair such as I had once; for though I says it as shouldn't say it, when Hogg married me I was a lovely creature."

"Mr. Hogg no doubt had an eye for the beautiful," said Arthur, inquiringly.

"Not a doubt on it," emphatically replied Mrs. Hogg.

"A good job that he is not alive now," thought Arthur, as he looked upon the grotesque ridge-and-furrow visage of Hogg's relict. Then after a brief pause he asked, "Has Mr. Hogg been long dead?"

"Five year," answered Mrs. Hogg. And the gar-

rulous old woman then wearied Arthur with a long story of her husband's last illness, with a full, true, and particular account of his death, and with a narration of all the privations and sufferings that she had had to go through since.

"It's a wretched world," observed Arthur, when Mrs. Hogg stopped talking—"a vale of tears." His sensations just then caused him to think that Christmas plum-pudding was an abominable invention.

"Those is just the words that our late rector, Mr. Blakrape, made use of in the last sermon—which was a funeral sermon—that ever I heerd him preach. It was the most beautifulest sermon that ever I listened to; it made me feel as if I'd never go and do nothink wicked never no more. The single ladies at his church were all in love with Mr. Blakrape; he was a bachelor, Mr. Howard, and lived in a willer——"

"A weeping willer?" inquired Arthur, lugubriously. The whim had suddenly seized him, at the last words that she had spoken, to bamboozle and confuse the old woman in her talk.

"A villa!" exclaimed Rotha, correcting Arthur.

"Yes, a willer!" almost shouted Mrs. Hogg, who imagined that Arthur had simply not heard her distinctly. "Little did I think that in two days after that sermon poor Mr. Blakrape would be lying in his coffin in that there willer; yet so it was—so it was!"

Mrs. Hogg sighed, shook her head, and emptied her glass of gin-and-water.

"Life is very uncertain," remarked Arthur, in a dismal tone. "Who knows but what you and I, Mrs. Hogg, in two days' time may be in *our* coffins? We both *look* fit to play our 'destined' parts as corpses without further rehearsing. Sooner or later we must all come to the grave; and it seems to me it is just as well to do so soon as late."

"But Mr. Blakrape dying so soon was a bad job for me, though," replied Mrs. Hogg; "for he knew me well, and that I always went to church, and not to dissenting places, and he was a great friend to me when in trouble. And it was just after his death that I met with my accident, which laid me up, when I had paid every penny I had away for rent, and the lodgings wasn't let, and Rotha couldn't get no needle-work to do. It was hard times with us here just before you came, Mr. Howard."

"You hadn't any relatives to help you, I suppose?"

"Bless your soul, no! I have a married sister whose heart was good to help me, but then she's so poor, you see. Almost all she could do for me was to come sometimes and try and cheer me up, and have a good cry with me."

"That must have been *some* comfort to you," said Arthur. "I wish that I had a sister to——" then

checking himself, he turned to Rotha and said, "But I was forgetting myself, for I regard you as a sister."

"I will be more than a sister to you," said Rotha, impulsively; and then quickly seeing that her words might easily be misunderstood, she added, laughing, "I mean that I will be a mother to you."

"She often says she have such a motherly feeling towards you," said Mrs. Hogg. These words having caused her host to look at her, she took up her glass, and pretended just then to discover that it was empty.

Seeing this, Arthur pushed the bottle of gin towards her, saying, "Help yourself, Mrs. Hogg; don't be afraid of it. I bought it principally for you, knowing you to be very fond of a drop of gin."

"You're very kind, Mr. Howard. I won't deny that I *am* very partial to a little really good gin like this here is—I find it soothes me like." So saying, Mrs. Hogg poured out a good dose of the soothing liquid into her tumbler, diluted it with warm water from the jug on the table, and then half emptied her glass at one draught.

"There's no doubt," remarked Arthur, "that gin-and-water, when the spirit is soft-flavoured like that we are drinking, is *very* soothing; more so, I think, than any other spirituous drink. I know that Lord Byron very beautifully says—

“ ‘There’s nought, no doubt, so much the spirit calms
As *rum* and true religion.’

But rum doesn’t agree with all constitutions—it’s apt to stir up the bile. In such cases, then, recourse must be had to some other stimulant in its place, and no better one exists, so far as my knowledge goes, than gin-and-water. Lord Byron himself, I believe, thought so too, for it was under the inspiration of gin-and-water that he wrote some of his finest poetry.”

“Lor! Did he now?” said Mrs. Hogg, emptying her glass.

“Well, I have read that he did so. But I expect that to kindle the imagination into a state of poetic inspiration, gin-and-water requires to be very carefully mixed. The gin must not be drowned, as it was in your last glass. Let me now mix you a glass, Mrs. Hogg, such as I conceive would be likely to set a ‘poet’s eye in a fine frenzy rolling.’”

The old woman nodded but did not speak—she was dozing. Arthur, staring at her in much annoyance, as he perceived that her extreme drowsiness threatened to spoil his fun, felt a sharp and meaning pressure on his foot that was nearest to Rotha, that seemed to say, “I want you to look at me.” The pressure happened to fall, or else was intentionally directed (for Rhoda knew that he had corns on both

his little toes), upon an extremely tender corn of Arthur's. Stung by pain, he glanced at Rotha almost angrily, but only for a moment to feel anything like anger, for the sight of a pretty face is even more effective than a soft answer in turning away wrath. The pretty face was turned towards Arthur, so that Mrs. Hogg, though she should open her eyes, could not see it. Without speaking, but simply by a subtle pantomime with her features, that greatly amused Arthur, Rotha scolded him for trying to make her aunt tipsy. From the look in her eyes, it seemed to him that he had been unfortunate enough to "get her monkey up." (she had no tiger, but only a monkey within her, to be woke up). The lines that he quoted from "Don Juan" had, he thought, no doubt irritated her. Being rather religious, and moreover a Wesleyan, she had taken them as a sneer at herself, as insinuating that she found comfort by indulging in spiritual rum. He felt dreadfully vexed with himself for having, as he believed, offended her, and so resolved to exert himself to the uttermost to pacify the irritated monkey in her mind. He did not quite see at first, however, the best means of doing this.

Luckily chance willed that while he was hesitating an incident should occur to aid him. The big iron kettle that Rotha, about half an hour previously, put on the hob, thinking tea would soon be wanted, began

now, from the large and glowing fire, to sing loudly. This suggested to Arthur the course of action that he had best follow.

"As soon as agreeable to you to make it, Rotha," he said, "I should be glad to have a cup of strong tea, and I dare say that your aunt would too."

"Then I'll make it at once," answered Rotha.

"And I'll put the gin away for to-day; some nice strong tea will be better for us than any more spirit," rejoined Arthur; and tightly corking the bottle, he put it away in the cupboard by the side of the fire-place.

Rotha quickly made the tea, and to make it draw well put the teapot on the hob opposite to that on which the iron kettle still stood singing. Then when she had laid the tea-things she sat down waiting for the tea to draw, still looking, as Arthur fancied, a little cross.

"It's strange," he then said, hoping to coax the offended young teetotal Methodist back into perfect good humour, by acting the part of the suddenly converted sinner—"it's strange how potently the singing of that kettle affected my mind. It made the sight of the gin-bottle become all at once an offence to my eyes, while the steam rushing from that kettle's spout seemed, to my fancy, to bring with it 'airs from heaven.' Then don't you think, Rotha, that, however

much my behaviour may appear to say the contrary, I must still love virtue in my heart? The people who delight to hear tea-kettles sing are mostly virtuous people, are they not? To me, in my present mood, it seems that the singing of the tea-kettle deserves to be regarded as sacred music—the sweet sacred music of home. I almost fancy that I can hear in it an echoing of the blessed song that on Christmas Day, more than eighteen hundred years ago, was sung by an angelic choir, promising ‘peace on earth, good-will to men.’ Blessings are often best appreciated by studying the evils that result from their absence. Look, then, into the homes where the heavenly singing of the tea-kettle is never heard, where the gin-bottle takes the place of the teapot, and what do we find? ‘Strife on earth and ill-will to men,’ such as must surely satisfy even the malignancy of the infernal spirit himself. When, therefore, knowing this, I just now, as my spirit by the holy singing of that tea-kettle was being calmed into a state of heavenly repose, chanced to let my eyes fall upon that gin-bottle—chanced to let my eyes fall upon that gin-bottle—I.——”

Momentarily at a loss for the words he wanted, he, to effectively occupy the pause that he was obliged to make, cast his eyes upon the place on the table where the gin-bottle had stood, turned up his nose, and caused his features generally to assume an ex-

pression of infinite disgust. At the same time he held out his right hand in the direction in which he looked, as if directing Rotha's attention to an object of abhorrence. This bit of pantomime immediately following on what he had previously said, appealed so powerfully to Rotha's feelings, that when he glanced at her to see what effect his acting was producing upon her, he noticed that the faultless, the adorable little nose, was, like his own, turned up, and that its surrounding features joined with it in making a face expressive of intensest disgust. Observing this, had an odd effect upon Arthur; he became infected, for the moment, with the fanatical teetotalism of the owner of the divine little nose and its attendant features. Sportively he had so stirred up a fire as to cause it to send forth sparks that set light to himself. As he looked at Rotha, a gust of sympathetic influence from her carried him completely off his mental legs.

"When," Arthur continued, after having collected his thoughts a bit—"when, as I was listening with a sweet sense of repose to the tea-kettle's singing, my eyes chanced to fall upon that gin-bottle, I sustained a most painful shock of disgust. It was such a shock as a devout mind would experience on hearing a drunkard blaspheming in the house of prayer. It distracted my spirit from the contemplation of the sacred peace of home, and dragged me, in imagina-

tion, amidst the hideous discords of the gin-palace, to hear the cursing and shrieking of quarrelling drunkards, and the yelling of wretches mad from adulterated gin, who, after he had emptied their pockets, were being kicked by the publican from the palace to the gutter." The last words were accompanied by vehement gestures.

Arthur paused, to see if Rotha would like to say anything, when Mrs. Hogg, who had been thoroughly aroused from her drowsiness by the preceding intemperate display of temperance oratory, immediately exclaimed in a loud shrill voice—

"Why, Mr. Howard, I declare you ought to be a play-actor at the the-a-ter! Those words you jest spoke is from Shakensphere, I s'pose? They brings to my mind something that I once heerd in a play of Shakensphere's when I was a gal, and father took me to the the-a-ter in Droory Lane— Amblet, I thinks they called the play, and—— " The awakened old woman jabbered on with a long story about what she heard at the theatre, and how she caught cold coming out of it into the chilly night air, and through it had a quinsy in her throat, of which she thought that she would have died, and so on.

While her aunt was thus occupied in plaguing Arthur, Rotha occupied herself in pouring out the tea. Arthur got a moment or two's peace while his

tormentor was engaged gulping down the contents of her cup, old-womanlike, scalding hot ; but as soon as she had finished doing this she began to wag her tongue wearily again, going on with her autobiographic reminiscences. She went on occupying the time with these long after tea was over, so as to prevent any further temperance talk taking place between her two younger companions. Still, Arthur remained so strongly under the moral influence that the pretty teetotaler seemed to exhale from her, that he did not venture even to ask her aunt to have a glass of hot grog as a nightcap. Rotha, when she cleared away the tea-things, had purposely also taken the tea-kettle downstairs, to save it from being perverted to the degrading function of supplying hot water for admixture with polluting gin. As soon as Mrs. Hogg became satisfied that her lodger did not intend to get out his gin-bottle again that day, she wished him good-night. Her niece, of course, then followed her example ; but as she did so she cast upon Arthur a smile of approbation so sweet as quite to put out of the question any possibility of his going to bed perfectly sober, even though he *did* scrupulously abstain from indulging in a single drop more of alcoholic liquor that night. Rotha's smile was to him that of an enchantress intoxicating by magic ; under its exquisitely subtle influence mechanical inebriation appeared to him gross and swinish. He

now profoundly pitied those who that night, in commemoration of the birth of a Saviour from sin, would hilariously go to bed "drunk as a lord;" he felt that *he* was privileged to know a diviner form of intoxication than theirs, and that he was about to joyously go to his bed "drunk with beauty" as a god.

Arthur, not having yet left his sitting-room, was aroused from these delicious reflections by hearing the front door of the cottage open and somebody go out. He had heard Mrs. Hogg go upstairs to bed a few minutes before, and Rotha, he knew, slept on an old couch in the room under his, in which room was the entrance-door. Looking out of window, he saw Rotha in the front garden, looking up at the stars, for it was a beautiful starlight night. Arthur at once surmised why she was doing so. He had latterly been trying to teach her to know the principal constellations, and she was taking the opportunity, as the weather was so favourable, of studying them by herself, as he had recommended her to do. As he stood looking at her the words were vividly recalled to his mind of the beautiful epigram—

"Thou gazest on the stars, my life! Ah! gladly would I be
Yon starry skies, with thousand eyes, that I might gaze on
thee!"

For, he fancifully thought, gazed upon by "thousand eyes" scattered all around her, her perfections, as seen from every point of view, might be rapturously

contemplated at one and the same moment of time. Her sweetly pretty face ; her faultless profile on both its sides ; both her right and left lovely little ears, that had no need of, and that had not, the adornment of earrings ; her back hair as she then enchantingly wore it in two long taper plaits, united at their ends by a bow of blue silk ribbon—all, all might be visibly embraced by his greedy eyes at once, instead of only tantalisingly one after another. And yet of those “thousand eyes” the special ones that he would most gladly be were, not those whose adoring beams were around her in a more universal manner than loving arms could be, but those particular ones whose rays directly fell upon the translucent windows of her soul, and so shining into it mingled their radiant glances with the diviner light of a seraphic soul-star.

Rotha, however, manifestly found the night too cold for star-gazing, for it was freezing sharply. She gave a little shiver, ran into the house, bolted the front door, and immediately afterwards the door of the room at the foot of the stairs. Arthur knew then that she was going to bed, and, as he began to feel somewhat sleepy himself, he thought that he had better follow her example. In a dreamy state of mind he entered into his bedroom ; but as there was no fire there, it struck rather cold, and this stimulated him into looking alive in undressing and getting into bed. But as soon as he began to feel warm and

snug in bed, he gave himself up again to the play of dreamy fancy about Rotha. Presently, as he lay in this state of sweet mental abandonment, Ben Jonson's loveliest of English love-songs, as he had once heard it very beautifully sung by a professional, was ravishingly recalled to his mind. Letting the words, in imagination, melodiously flow, just as he had then heard them, he mentally repeated the words of the first verse of the song.

“ Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine ;
Or leave a kiss within the cup,
And I'll not look for wine.
The thirst that from the soul doth rise
Doth ask a drink divine ;
But might I of Jove's nectar sip,
I would not change for thine.”

Thus “making melody in his heart” gave him such entrancing gratification that he resolved to continue it ; and as he did not know by heart the words of the second verse of the song, he set about repeating the first over again. When, however, he had got so far as to have repeated the lines—

“ The thirst that from the soul doth rise
Doth ask a drink divine ”—

from the effect of approaching sleep upon his brain, he was unable to recollect what followed, and laid languidly experiencing, in an increasing degree, a pleasing incapacity to do so, until he gently passed

into dreamland. There presently, to him, it was the morning of Christmas Day, and he was about to kiss Rotha under a suspended bough of mistletoe, when she escaped him and he awoke. But Rotha's pretty face then remained so persistently and vividly present to his mind, and the contemplation of it gave him such intense delight, that he imagined he must be in love with its owner—fondly, madly in love with her—and he rejoiced to think that it should be so. A profound passion would give to his dreary existence that intensity of life for which he craved—would wildly, inebriatingly bear him away he knew not whither. After a time his excitement began to die away, and he to grow drowsy again. He then found himself repeating mechanically just the same words as before he fell asleep—

“The thirst that from the soul doth rise
Doth ask a drink divine.”

“Doth ask a drink divine,” “Doth ask a ——” And when he had got thus far, the sweet oblivion of sleep stole over his senses once more, and soon he fell into a far profounder slumber than before—into that temporary state of Nirvâna, that dreamless “rapture of repose,” in which even restless imagination finds rest—in which all consciousness of the existence of an isolated self, having insatiable selfish desires, is blissfully, for a little while, clean blotted out.

CHAPTER X.

AUGURY BY FIRE.

THE orthodox English mode of keeping the great feast-day of the year is a terribly trying one for the dyspeptic. A splitting headache and "the blue devils" on the day following are its natural consequences, and so Arthur got up on Boxing Day suffering under both those afflictions. Worse still, that grand, inebriating passion that he had gone to sleep the night before, rejoicing in believing that he felt for Rotha, now that he had slept on it, appeared to him to have no foundation in fact. He found himself, in his altogether changed state of mind and body, looking back upon his fancied love of the preceding evening as a passing intoxication of the imagination, brought about through his nerve-fibres chancing to be momentarily strung to the right pitch to respond to the play of a necessarily fleeting combination of external circumstances. "Love," says the Song of Songs, "is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame." Recalling to his mind this

powerful description of true love with its necessary attendant jealousy, he was driven to recognise that most unequivocally no such deep vehement feelings animated his heart in regard to Rotha; that he was still as he had hitherto been throughout his career, an utter stranger to the grand passion. Should Rotha tell him that she was about to give her hand and heart to some other man than himself, he now felt convinced that, instead of being made mad by jealousy at the news, he should simply hope that she might be happy in her new state of life, and consider what would be the most useful wedding present for him to make her. Instead of, in disappointed rage, putting a bullet into her brain, or a knife into her heart, he believed that he should most likely give her a good stock of serviceable house-linen with which to begin her married life. But had his heart but really been imbued with that utter abandonment to passion that he had deliriously dreamed of its being in the night that was just past, he would have thought nothing of being hung for Rotha, and then he would have been lifted out of his wretched self in right good earnest, which was what he so ardently longed for. His awakening to his real state of heart was a most bitter disappointment; he had tumbled from the clouds, to lie groaning, in a shattered and helpless condition, upon the hard and stony earth.

Everything conspired to complete his disenchantment. Rotha when she brought up his breakfast presented a most untidy personal appearance, begging Arthur to excuse her on account of her having overslept herself. She had had so to hurry, she said, to get his breakfast, that she had not had time even to wash her face. Looking intently at her face, Arthur was almost distressed by the appearance it presented. Not only did it plainly want washing generally, but, no doubt from her having rubbed it with her hand while lighting the fires, there were several black streaks on her cheeks radiating from her lips, and a great black spot upon her nose. These gave, or to Arthur's morbid imagination seemed to give, to her face a painfully grotesque appearance. Moreover, he found from the little conversation that he then had with her that she was in a somewhat cross and disagreeable humour, in that peculiar mental state which is vulgarly described as the result of "getting out of bed on the wrong side."

On leaving the room (the latch being rather faulty) she omitted to close the door properly. Arthur perceiving this after she had been gone some minutes, got up to shut the door. On doing so he heard Mrs. Hogg nagging at her niece about being behindhand with her work, and was rather surprised as well as shocked to hear Rotha retort in a manner that did

not at all harmonise with his ideas as to the way an angelic being should answer her old aunt.

Disenchanted, demoralised, his sick headache rapidly becoming worse, in an altogether dismal condition both of mind and body, he sat down to the breakfast-table, only to gulp down two cups of coffee: he felt quite unable to swallow a single morsel of solid food.

When he knocked on the floor for the breakfast-things to be cleared away, it was Mrs. Hogg herself who came up in answer. Rotha, she explained to Arthur, had gone on an errand into the village. The village referred to was that of Serfswell, near to which Daisy Cottage was situated.

"Please fill the vinegar cruets and bring it up to me again," said Arthur to Mrs. Hogg, just as she was going to leave the room. "I have a miserable sick headache, and want to bathe my temples with vinegar-and-water presently."

"Very good, sir; I am sorry to say that I've got a nasty headache myself. It's the goose, Mr. Howard, that has upset us both. People with such weak stomachs as you and me has, always requires a little drop of brandy after goose, even though it's only a thimbleful."

"You mean it settles the goose?" said Arthur.

"Yes, it do. Without it, goose is apt to rise—

'specially when it's such a one as we had yesterday — it was so strong."

Unquestionably the goose referred to was strong, and so, fortified with Mrs. Hogg's decided opinion that it was the cause of his sufferings, Arthur did not feel that he was doing any injustice to its memory when, being left to himself, he cried out bitterly, again and again, "Oh, — that goose!" Bad habit as swearing is, these explosive anathemas did him good. They gave him the same kind of relief that tortured humanity often finds in screams and groans.

Having spent the morning in bathing his temples with vinegar and water, and — the goose, he in the afternoon laid down and slept for several hours, and on awakening had some strong tea, after which he was much better. But the disagreeable, though natural, consequence of his sleeping in the day, was that he was unable to sleep at night. He went to bed at midnight, only to toss restlessly to and fro for an hour or more, without feeling the slightest symptom of drowsiness. His vexation at not being able to sleep helped to make him the more wakeful. At length, in a state of great nervous irritation, he jumped up, and, throwing on some clothes, walked restlessly backwards and forwards the length of his room. As he thus paced up and down, he looked, with

his grey woollen dressing-gown on, and his hair wildly disordered, like a sentry in his overcoat, whose hat had got blown away by the wind. That he should be without a rifle and bayonet, seemed natural — he looked so unfit to be trusted with either.

He had wearily spent about half an hour thus, and was just thinking he would go to bed again and try once more to sleep, when a tom cat in the garden commenced an energetic serenade, and a feline Juliet warmly responded. At these sleep-banishing sounds he opened the window, and by making a noise sought to drive the too demonstrative feline lovers away. But before he could succeed in doing so he was forced to listen to a sustained wailing so dismal, that to his fancy it supplied a vocal expression of his own wretchedness more dramatically appropriate than even Herr Wagner himself could have composed — was worthy of being regarded as representing the soul-wail of a being hunted down by Fate — forlorn, hopeless.

“Yet to the cats themselves,” he reflected, “those doleful sounds are, it may be presumed, the sweet strains of impassioned love. I wish that I were a cat and could enjoy such wild music! As I am, I feel that I am too morbidly nervous, too fanatically superfine, for that rude and simple animal life that is alone

suited to the conditions of existence on this weather-beaten planet. Beasts, birds, fishes, and insects are better off than I am. Miserable man excepted, that diffused expanse of matter enveloping the earth that in multitudinous forms—from fish in lowest deep to loftiest soaring eagles—lives and *feels*, no doubt feels at any given moment a far mightier totality of pleasures than of pains. For the sensations that, in inconceivable variety, are continuously being realised on the skin of mother earth, are for the most part (man excepted) the sensations of young and healthy life, and animal joyousness naturally accompanies youth and health. At all events, the state of the rest of sentient nature seems happy contrasted with that of miserable man. His ‘poetry of despair’ is manifestly no representative wail of universal life that feels, but the mere whining and yelping of one unlucky animal, whose doom is exceptional, galled by the chain that holds it by its kennel, and panting to be free.”

Instinctively at this point in his musings he turned his eyes from earth to heaven, and his *mind* then saw a glorious sight. There burst upon *its* view a mighty host of suns upon suns whose splendours were illuminating vast systems of attendant orbs. The spectacle was one calculated rather to dazzle than to bring repose to sleepless eyes. Fascinated, he stood con-

templating the glorious scene. His nerves, highly strung, seemed trembling in harmony with the undulations of light radiating in the pure ether of space; his heart, with its quickened and vigorous rhythmic pulsations, seemed beating time to "the music of the spheres."

This fit of high emotion was a quickly passing one. He had been startled into self-forgetfulness by the grandeur of the spectacle that had, unexpectedly, displayed itself before his eyes; but the shock of surprise over, his morbid self-consciousness returned. He became once again the central object of interest to his own mind, and all around him was regarded in its relations to his own position. He saw himself as a *thinking* speck of matter on a cooling sun-cinder, gyrating in the abyss of space, the darkness of the infinite expanse partially lit up by a whirling universe of fiercely incandescent globes hurling burning matter from their surfaces into space with volcanically eruptive uproar. Amidst this Titanic working of blind, unconscious forces, what availed his far-reaching, his wide-embracing consciousness? Only to overwhelm him with the perception that, whatever appalling results these struggling energies of brute matter might chance to produce, his doom would be to look on, like a paralysed spectator, in abject helplessness.

At that moment he felt that it was an awful thing to

be a human being—a maddening mystery. “Forming part of Nature, why,” he said to himself, “am I not at one with her? That Nature is a unity is shown even by mere masses of brute matter regarded simply as assemblages of atoms. Every centre of gravity is a centre of unity to the atoms grouping themselves around it, and is in direct sympathetic union itself with similar centres throughout space. And is not the highest, the most intense manifestation of Nature’s fundamental unity, to be seen in the totality of the operations of her varied forces gathered together as into a focus in the personal consciousness, the indivisible unity of the ‘I’ of man? Why is it, then, that the most perfect subordinate unities of a system that as a whole is a unity, are condemned to exist, cut off from all *direct* union with one another, and out of harmony with the rest of that system? The force of gravity is transmitted from one star to all other stars, and from them to it, instantaneously; but with other concentrated unities of universal force like itself, the human mind has no *direct* interchange of power at all. The highly complex and specialised material conditions necessary to the evolution of self-conscious minds may have been fulfilled in a host of other worlds; but if so, and such minds exist, that is practically of no moment to me. They do not exist as energies exerting a regulative mental influence upon

me. And with the minds like my own existing on the earth, I can only hold *indirect* communication by material telegraphic signalling uncertain in its operations. I work my arms as semaphores; I make all sorts of absurd sounds as signs with my throat, mouth, and nose; but no one thoroughly understands *me*, nor do I the signalling of any other 'me.' The penalty of being an 'I' is isolation—conscious isolation. It is to suffer the fate of a mental Robinson Crusoe, and to reign as king on an island alone. It is to know that, though there are other such solitary island kings, they must remain essentially unknown and unknowable. It is to feel in a state of disunion with the material universe, for this mysterious 'I' cannot even be conceived of as in union with what fills space. Yet it seems an outcome of cosmic forces. Being, then, numbered amongst the offspring of Nature, ought I not still to feel at home with her and amongst my real relations? Why should existence appear to me so wonderfully strange? That it does so is to me unutterably strange."

Surrendering himself to the feeling of the extreme strangeness of his surroundings appearing foreign to him, thought was temporarily paralysed in him. His mind stood still in mute wonderment. This stupor of intellect passing, he went on with his speculative reverie,

“ Can it be that Nature, who in her works is ever ambitiously striving to progress, has in a supreme and final effort, with blind presumption, sought to transcend the normal limits of her formative energy ? Has she, with a tragic yet absurd audacity, taken a leap forwards, aiming to attain that which is necessarily impossible—to get beyond herself ? ”

As Arthur threw his reflections into this last form of expression, he looked for his words to paint spontaneously some mental picture that should illustrate and give vividness to the idea then present to him. This not occurring, and his bewildered mind craving some such illustration, he sought voluntarily to make one. Nature had to be personified, and then represented as making a transcendent effort. In selecting the form of her impersonation, that which naturally suggested itself was that of the organic structure from which the madly ambitious leap took place—that of the ape. But how to represent the transcendent effort itself ? The only way in which he was able to conceive of a material thing even seeming to cast itself beyond itself was with its own shadow. But might not man with propriety be thus figuratively represented ? What is a shadow but the light cut off by some object ? And is not the light allotted to all else cut off to man by Nature, and he left all in the dark as to his true state of nature ?

So he personified Nature as a gigantic she-ape, and man as her dark shadow projected in front of her. The brighter physical light is, the darker is the shadow cast in it, and blacker became that ape-like shadow as Arthur, in his morbid tendency to exaggeration and love of intense contrasts, imaginatively heightened the light around it. It became a funereal shadow, a shadow of mysterious horror, a fiend of a shadow. Excited by his symbolical representation, he gave action and appropriate surroundings to its figures. He fancied he beheld the savage universal mother by imperious movements making known her will, and all things implicitly obeying her. He imagined also he saw her frightful shadow impudently burlesquing her gestures of command, distorting itself into hideously derisive forms, perpetrating gesticulations so abominable that at length, horror-struck, she turned and fled, the writhing shape of darkness following at her heels.

"Seen only in her own light," said Arthur, mentally, "the product of Nature's effort to go beyond herself has a fearful appearance. All other animals fulfil their instincts and satisfy their appetites in a direct, unsophisticated manner. But man is cursed with an imperious instinct *to know* without limit; is tormented by the flames of unquenchable desire. Hence he has greedily wrested fatal secrets from

matter ; has discovered unlawful pleasures ; has invented horrid compounds to inflame his senses with delirious joys — unlawful pleasures and delirious joys that are infernal in their appalling blasting power ; that shatter health, madden minds, and ruin souls. An animal of insatiable appetites, endowed with a godlike ability to control them, would appear to have been Nature's original design for her masterpiece. A creature with an infinite ferocity of desire has been accomplished, but the godlike part of the design, where is that ? To mould an Apollo radiant with his victory over the Python has proved beyond Nature's artistic skill. Instead she has achieved a vanquished form bound by the python's deadly coils, a crushed mass besmeared with the big serpent's slime."

The notion that evolutionary development might have been carried too far in one direction, that animality in its last stage had broken loose from the normal order of organic existence, filled Arthur, as his mind dwelt upon it, with vague feelings of horror and despair. Nor were these feelings in any way diminished as he thought of the present rapid progress of materialistic philosophy, as he reflected that the conceptions of the capacities of matter inspired by modern physical research are so lofty, that the belief that even mind itself is but one of its properties becomes difficult to resist.

"If this triumphing belief be true," he thought, "then there is no mind above Nature, and man is a machine without a soul—Nature's Frankenstein. Nor does physical science permit me to satisfy the mental craving that I feel to account, in some way or other, for man and his misery, by seeing in him an abnormal phase of animal existence necessary to be passed through before some higher organisation can be evolved. Advanced anatomical investigation rather points to the conclusion that in the human form is seen the highest structure that the formative 'potency of matter' is capable of building up. The unrelenting progressive impulse in Nature seems doomed on earth to struggle in man like pent-up, surging waters. In vain the tossing waves rear their crested heads, and seek to leap over the allotted boundary. They are but dashed back, and scattered as impotent human foam, by the iron dam of Fate. Nature is left to show her insatiable ambition by seeking to force man to be greater than man. But, though she does not spare torturing pains in trying ever to stretch him to the indefinite greatness that she aspires after, his stature is increased in mocking seeming only. He is made to resemble some wretch extended on the rack, who, from straining and dislocation, looks to have added to his length. How long is this mystery of pain to last? When will the tragedy of human history have an end?

“Amongst the millions of suns burning in space, one or other of them, on rare occasions, is seen in such fierce conflagration that life must become impossible on its planets. Is there any reason to expect that the one round which the earth revolves is likely to become ‘a sun in flames’? It would appear not; it would appear that such solar conflagrations occur only in a particular region of the Milky Way, or else amongst certain sun-stars forming what may be compared to an overflowing or splashing from the Milky Way. Our sun seems quite out of the region of the universe where such glorious flareups take place. To look forward, then, to the evolution of terrestrial life being abruptly terminated by one of them, is to indulge in an expectation that scientific observation and research do not sanction. As countless ages yet roll away, it may be presumed that the earth will continue to roll on its course, with organised portions of its surface continuing to be endowed with feeling. But the shrieks and groans and moans of wretched men—must *they* also very long continue to ascend into the wastes of space, to die away there unanswered and unechoed?

“Since this sun-cinder, the earth, has been slowly cooling down from a glowing mass of all the astounding varieties of kinds of living things that have been developed upon it, the human species is the last great

novelty. And in the gradual cooling progress of the planet towards a state of arid desolation, like that of the moon, it may be assumed that it will cease to be habitable for man long, long before it becomes unfit for the abode of myriads of lower living forms. The Protean manifestations of terrestrial life are, then, to be mentally seen as going on for countless ages before and after the existence of man. In the immensity of their duration, he appears relatively but as the startling phenomenon of a moment. This, then, is the most satisfactory thought that I can derive from modern scientific teaching as to the fate of humanity—that in it, in the ascent of being, the heaven-aspiring mountain-peak has been attained, where the air is too rarefied, and the freezing cold too intense, for other than a brief sojourn. The human race, I remember some *savant* saying whose name I forget, is not unlikely to become extinct at the next glacial epoch. Ice, applied to animality's cancerous head, will, there seems hope, ultimately relieve its tortures. Earthly, self-conscious nature appears destined, by exposure to overpowering cold, to ultimately sink into dreamless sleep, congealing frost sealing down its weeping eyes in eternal darkness. And if, indeed, this mortal life be all," cried Arthur, aloud, "then, in the name of hopeless suffering, in the name of impotent, despairing thought, O glacial epoch, come effectively, and come quickly!"

He shivered, his teeth chattered; standing absorbed in his reflections at the open window, he had become almost frozen by the icy air of that winter's night. The chilled surface of his body, after having, by its sensations, powerfully influenced the form and colour of his thoughts, had now imperiously drawn wholly to itself his mind's attention. Closing the window, he went into his sitting-room, to see if the fire was still alight. He found it just smoulderingly alive. After spending some time unsuccessfully in trying, by applying pieces of lighted paper and holding a newspaper before it as a blower, to make it burn up, he judged it best to let it alone for a few minutes. Watching it with impatience, he paced restlessly to and fro. As he waited, and it gave no hopes of growing brighter, it presently appeared to his irritated and discontented mind as typical of his own condition. His feelings at length found vent in words. With looks and gestures, as if addressing some other person, he thus talked to himself:—

“Life with me is like that wretched fire—dim and smouldering—destitute of all warmth and brightness. Trying to produce these, I heap on fresh fuel; I exhaust all possible efforts to succeed: in vain—all ends in smoke.” His eyes now chanced to fall upon his engraving of Poussin's “Bacchanalian Dance,” that hung over the old sofa, or rather sofa-bedstead,

facing the window. He had had this engraving down from his former lodgings at Gloucester Street, Regent's Park (Mrs. Potts having taken care of it for him for some time), and had hung it in its present position because there was already an old print of Mrs. Hogg's over the chimney-piece in the bedroom that he occupied in Daisy Cottage. The engraving brought vividly to his remembrance the painting of Poussin in the National Gallery, and the picture seemed to him to breathe a spirit that caused him to recall the words of Alfred De Musset—

" Jouis, dit la raison païenne ;
Jouis et meurs : les dieux ne songent qu'à dormir."

"That," continued Arthur aloud, resuming his walking up and down in which he had for a moment or two paused, as he contemplated the "Bacchanalian Dance"—"that is what I thirst to do before I die—to press to my parched lips the cup of joy. Intensely to live, not drearily to vegetate, that is the craving that torments me. I long for an experimental knowledge of what ordinarily developed human nature is. At present I have merely a one-sided knowledge of it; I have tasted its miseries but not its pleasures. Blessed with the possession of many of the means of enjoyment, I am mockingly cursed with the want of the power to enjoy. I want to be able to love, to hope,

to laugh, to dance, to sing, like other people, or at least to be capable of sharing their pleasures by hearty sympathy. I am told that the fire of life, burning dimly and feebly as it does with me, has its compensations; that in consequence I have no liability to high fever or violent inflammation; but I would gladly take my chance of suffering from these in exchange for an abundant supply of rich blood, a vigorous pulse, and a stomach that would digest roast goose, and the stuffing too, without grumbling."

He stopped soliloquising and savagely poked the still smouldering fire, with the only effect, however, of making it burn not quite so well as before. Emblem of his own languishing existence, he thought, it seemed like it defiant of all attempts to improve it. The condition of both seemed almost hopeless. But the fate of the fire must soon be decided one way or the other; his own might be more lingering, yet he felt mad with impatience to know soon what that would be also. The whimsical idea then entered his head that in the future of the fire he would see a good or bad omen of his own. As Rousseau resolved that a conviction as to whether he was to be saved or damned should be settled in his own mind accordingly as a stone that he threw at a tree should hit or miss it, so Arthur resolved that whether or not a

healthful or a morbid life was before him should be predicted by the fire as it happened to kindle into brightness or to fade into darkness.

While waiting anxiously for the omen, he gave himself permission to indulge in a little gin-and-water to relieve his cold and miserable state of feeling. Having got the gin-bottle out of the cupboard by the fire-place, he fetched the water-bottle and tumbler, and also his medicine-glass, from his bedroom. He then carefully measured in his physic-glass exactly three tablespoonfuls of gin for dilution in the tumbler. He then replaced the gin-bottle in the cupboard, and would have locked the door only the lock was off; but he firmly resolved that he would not take the bottle out again that night.

Sitting at the table, he watched the smoking coals in the grate by casting troubled looks upon them from time to time. In the intervals of so doing he occupied himself by reading listlessly the torn remainder of the *Reading Mercury*, the missing portions of which he had destroyed in trying to make the fire burn.

But the dose of gin-and-water that he had taken proved utterly insufficient to stimulate him to the moderate degree that he had expected. The morbid capriciousness of his deranged organisation caused the spirit, so far as it had any effect at all, rather to

aggravate his despondency than to exhilarate him. Disgusted with the effects of moderation, he set his firm resolution at defiance, and indulged in a second glass of gin-and-water, without measuring in his physic-glass the quantity of spirit that he took. As he emptied his tumbler, he gave a look at the fire, and thought it seemed brightening up a little. Feeling no longer in the humour to read or to do anything, he, in utter weariness, put his elbows on the table, and buried his face in his hands. And as he remained thus, not looking for it, sleep came.

Dreaming that the house was on fire and he at a loss how to escape, he awoke, and starting up in a fright, found the remains of the *Reading Mercury* in flames before him, and his candlestick overturned. This accident had plainly occurred through his having restlessly made some movement in his sleep. He now caught up the hearthrug, and with it covered and extinguished the burning paper. In so doing he knocked from the table on to the floor the tumbler and water-bottle that he had been using, which struck together and were smashed with a great crash. This noise brought Mrs. Hogg, wrapped in an old cloak, down to his room, her withered face expressing great curiosity and alarm.

"I am extremely sorry to have disturbed you, Mrs. Hogg," said Arthur, hurriedly, to the bewildered old

woman ; "but I fell asleep reading, and unfortunately must have knocked the candle over, and so set the newspaper alight. In putting it out with the hearth-rug, I upset and broke the water-bottle and tumbler that I had been making use of in taking a little gin-and-water."

Mrs. Hogg glanced significantly at Arthur, and then at the cupboard where the gin and beer were. The old woman, he perceived, was mentally questioning the accuracy of his statement as to the quantity of gin-and-water that he had taken. She, however, contented herself with saying—

"It's a mercy we have not all been burnt alive. I hope you're not hurt, sir?"

"No, nothing to speak of; only a little singed. But I am afraid that coming out of your warm bed, this winter's night, down the draughty stairs, with but little clothing on, is likely to bring on one of your attacks of rheumatism. Will you take a drop of gin, to keep out the cold?"

"You're very kind, Mr. Howard; I don't mind if I do—just a drain," answered Mrs. Hogg, picking up the pieces of broken glass and putting them inside the fender, and then adding, "Ah! who would have thought it? Here's this ain't got broke at all," as she picked up the medicine-glass, and put it undamaged on the table.

Arthur, having got the gin out of the cupboard, and filled the medicine-glass with some of it, handed this to his landlady, saying—

“You won’t mind drinking out of a physic-glass? you’re taking the gin as a preventive medicine, you know.”

“O dear no, sir,” answered Mrs. Hogg, taking the glass and raising it to her lips, and then adding, before wetting them with the gin, “Here’s my respects to you, Mr. Howard.”

“Will Rotha also take a little—*medicinally*?” asked Arthur, as the old woman put down the empty glass. He had just noticed her niece standing in the doorway, partially dressed, and with a large brown woollen shawl thrown over her head. The fold of this, projecting much beyond her forehead, and having its two sides held closely together under her chin, gave her face, which was very pale, the look of that of some religious ascetic withdrawn from the world into a monstrous hood. As Arthur’s eyes met hers, she turned away, as if in disgust, and disappeared downstairs.

“Good-night, sir,” said Mrs. Hogg, as she also took her departure. “Don’t you think you had better go to bed at once? You might catch your death of cold, sitting, a night like this, without a fire.”

"Good-night, Mrs. Hogg; I *am* going to bed directly," replied Arthur, nervously.

"*Without a fire !*" He recollected at that moment his decision to see in the fate of the fire an augury of his own ; and, looking eagerly towards the grate, he saw with a shudder that its contents had ceased even to smoke, and were quite black.

CHAPTER XI.

A METHODIST CLASS-MEETING.

As he said he should do to Mrs. Hogg, Arthur went to bed immediately after she had left him, and slept until about four o'clock, when he awoke, and was unable to get to sleep again. The recollection of what had transpired in his sitting-room a few hours before filled him with the greatest distress of mind. He felt that he had lowered himself in the eyes of one with whom he had the most earnest desire to stand well. Though he was not really intoxicated when he set on fire the newspaper and broke the water-bottle and tumbler, yet he had no doubt that Rotha believed he was so. He tormented himself in trying to invent some plausible explanation, by which he might hope to lead her to think otherwise. But his powers of invention failed to produce any that struck him as likely to succeed: there was no goose for a scapegoat this time. And if, he thought, he should positively deny that he was drunk, she would most probably think him a liar. If he should swear that he was not so, she would, he feared, regard him as perjuring himself. He was at

his wits' end to know what to say to her. All kinds of painful scenes between them—absurdly improbable scenes, in which he was overwhelmed with shame—pictured themselves to his mind. In vain, reason, from time to time exerting its sway, showed him that he was worrying himself with the insane exaggerations of a morbid imagination. It was like trying to shoot ghosts: the smoke may temporarily hide the horrors, but they cannot be slain by the bullets.

When daylight came, and he got up and became actively employed in dressing, his nervous fears, after the manner of such early morning fears, assumed a far less serious form. He then remembered, too, that Rotha was a member of a Temperance Society, and the idea suggested itself to him that it would be a simple way of getting reinstated in her good graces for him to express a desire to attend some of its meetings, and to ask her to give him some information about it. If, he thought, he showed an inclination to take the pledge, that would, no doubt, make him seem interesting in her eyes. Probably, too, she would then cease to regard what had happened the night before as a mere drunken accident, but would see in it the hand of Providence leading him to become a thorough teetotaler; and an opportunity offering itself for her to help Providence would, as she was religious, naturally please her.

Carrying out his idea as quickly as possible, he made inquiries of Rotha, when she brought up his breakfast, about the Temperance Society to which she belonged. She was unable, however, to give him any certain information about its meetings, as she had not been able to attend any of them for some time. Her aunt, now that she had a lodger, would not spare her to go out more than one night in the week, and then she went to her class-meeting at Zion Chapel. But her class-leader, Mr. Woods, she further said, was also the Secretary of the Temperance Society that she belonged to, and therefore it would be easy for her to learn from him anything about it that Mr. Howard wished to know. She thought, however, it would be a better plan for Mr. Howard to come to the chapel, and see Mr. Woods himself. That evening, if he liked, Mr. Howard might come, for she was going to her class-meeting then. This lasted from seven to eight o'clock; so that, if Mr. Howard got to Zion Chapel not later than eight, he could see Mr. Woods, and have a talk with him. This Arthur agreed to do, and Rotha gave him precise directions how to find the chapel, that was situated in a rather out-of-the-way part of the neighbouring village of Serfswell, and also the position of the door under the chapel to which he was to come.

At tea-time Rotha repeated to him these directions,

and told him that she should be very much disappointed if he did not come to Zion Chapel, at eight o'clock, to be introduced to Mr. Woods. Arthur replied that he had fully made up his mind that he would come.

Keeping to his resolution, he arrived at Zion Chapel just as the clock in the old Norman tower of Serfswell Church was striking eight, and after descending a flight of steps at the side of the chapel, rang the bell at a side door in the basement. Rotha, expecting him, quickly answered the bell, and then told him that the class-leader having been prevented coming until nearly half-past seven, the proceedings would not be over for twenty minutes or so. But perhaps, she suggested, Mr. Howard might like to see what a Methodist class-meeting was like. Arthur answered that he should like to do so, and Rotha then led him into the room where the meeting was going on.

On entering, he was about to seat himself on the same form as Rotha, when she whispered to him that he must go over to one which stood nearly against the wall opposite. Arthur then noticed that there were only women on the side where Rotha took her seat. The men sat facing the women. Between them, in the middle of the small and—with its yellow-washed plaster walls—humble-looking room, stood an oblong deal table. At one end of this, so

that he had the women on his right hand, sat the leader of the class, Mr. Woods, an elderly and rather intelligent-looking working man. Rotha had mentioned to Arthur in the morning that he was a carpenter. Arthur counted seven women and girls present, including Rotha, and three men besides Mr. Woods and himself. Most of the little company, it was but too plain to him, were poor creatures, to whom the present was a bitter life, who had to accept semi-starvation in hovels as the reward of incessant grinding toil. Such had indeed need, he thought, of the hope of by-and-by living in mansions in the skies, where hunger is unknown, and it is always Sunday.

Immediately after Arthur's entry, the leader called upon an odd and bewildered-looking old woman in widow's weeds, addressing her as Sister Loothar, to state the condition of her soul that evening.

Sister Loothar thanked God that her face was still turned Zionwards. The devil—and she spoke of him in as matter-of-fact a way as if he had been a drunken husband—had sorely tried to prevent her coming there that night, just as she was about to start. She had, however, retired into a corner and prayed, and struggled, and overcome the tempter. And now she was there she trusted in God to give her a blessing.

Mr. Woods gave her some practical advice as to the best means of putting the devil to flight, and then inquired of a girl sitting by her side—whose face had a family likeness to that of the old woman, and who looked very ill—as to her spiritual state. He addressed her as Sister Cowper.

Sister Cowper began to cry bitterly, and expressed great fear that she was in a backsliding condition. Whenever she tried to read her Bible she was distressed and distracted by mocking, blasphemous thoughts; she feared that she had committed blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, and that her soul was lost. At this confession sobs choked her voice, and she was unable to say more.

Arthur was pleased to notice that, in giving counsel to this unhappy member of the class, Mr. Woods clearly explained to her that her state of mind was mainly the result of bodily disorder. He of course thought Satan had something to do with it—taking advantage of her weakness to torment her. But he took great pains to try and make her see that the very distress that the dreadful thoughts gave her showed that they were not assented to by her own will, and therefore could not involve guilt. His words seemed to have a soothing effect upon the poor girl, for she dried her eyes and stopped crying.

The class-leader then looking at Rotha, who sat

last upon the women's form, said, "And now, Sister Redbreast (Rotha's surname was Redbreast), what state of spiritual experience have you to report this evening?"

At Rotha being thus addressed Arthur fixed his big eyes upon her. This disconcerted her a little, a slight flush suffused her cheeks, and she hesitated about commencing a confession of the present experience of her soul until, a little impatiently, Mr. Woods said—

"Well, Sister Redbreast?"

"Well, sir," then answered Rotha, "I do not know how I could better express my feelings towards my God at this moment than by quoting the words of the Psalmist, 'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name.' I sometimes think that if I were tempted to sin, as many others are, I should fall from a state of grace; but I thank God that He has preserved me from falling until now, and I trust in His goodness to preserve me to the end."

In the remarks that Mr. Woods addressed to Rotha when she had finished speaking, he treated rather too severely, it seemed to Arthur, her avowal of being sometimes fearful that she would morally succumb, should her temptations to do so be increased. He reminded her, in concluding, that "they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and

not be weary ; and they shall walk, and not faint." He emphasised the last words, " shall walk and not faint," and then told Rotha that she must learn to walk more with God, to preserve a more heavenly collectedness of spirit as to the one thing needful, and then she would not feel faint-hearted about resisting successfully any temptation that might befall her.

It was now the turn of one of the men to give his experience ; but instead of calling upon one of them to do so, Mr. Woods, after looking at his watch, said he was very sorry that he was unable to stay more than a minute or two longer. One of his children was seriously ill, and he had appointed to meet the doctor at half-past eight. It was thereupon arranged that the meeting should be brought to a close. At the leader's request, a young man answering to the name of Brother Jenkins then offered up a brief prayer with truly Wesleyan fervour. Afterwards a verse from J. Montgomery's, " For ever with the Lord "—but one, as Mr. Woods was so pressed for time—was sung by all the members of the class :—

" Here, in the body pent,
Absent from Him I roam ;
Yet nightly pitch my moving tent
A day's march nearer home.
Nearer home,
Nearer home,
A day's march nearer home."

These lines, though sung much more boisterously than most Church of England people would have thought proper, impressed Arthur pleasingly. The manner seemed appropriate to the figurative picture the words suggested to his mind—that of rough soldiers halting at nightfall on their march through an enemy's country towards their native land.

Every member of the class having paid his or her weekly subscription of a penny, or more, the meeting terminated, and Mr. Woods hurried away. Arthur's intended talk with him about the Temperance Society, of which he was the secretary, had of course to be postponed to a future opportunity.

Directly Arthur got outside the chapel he was rather surprised at Rotha, a little excitedly, running from his side. Following her with his eyes, he saw her go up to a peculiar-looking young man, with a very visionary expression of countenance, who stood at a little distance off, talking to a member of the class, and shake hands heartily with him. Other members of the class, as they came up the steps from the basement of the chapel, on perceiving this young man, ran up to him and did as Rotha had done.

"That's Mr. Woods' eldest son," said Rotha, as she rejoined Arthur and they started homewards together. "He had come to tell his father that the doctor was waiting for him at home. He met him

and told him just as he was within a few steps of the chapel, and then he thought he would just stay to shake hands with his friends here. He's a lay preacher; he preaches so beautifully, and is a great favourite with us all at Zion Chapel. You ought to come and hear him some Sunday. I'll let you know the next time I hear that he's going to preach."

"Thank you; I wish you would."

"Oh, I'll make a point of doing so; I should so like you to hear him. When he preaches about hell, it gives me quite a creeping in my backbone. He's going to London in a day or two, to stay there for a short time, that he may preach at a course of Revivalist services that are to be given at a Methodist chapel at Paddington."

"Ah! I must try and hear him preach some day."

"And I hope that when you do he will do you good; he's brought many to a sense of sin."

"He's not paid for preaching, I suppose, but works at some trade for his living?"

"O no, he's not paid for preaching; he's a journeyman carpenter, and works often at the same place as his father. But now that you have been at one, what do you think of a Wesleyan class-meeting?"

"It's such a novel affair to me, that I hardly know what to think of it. What struck me as most curious was the way that poor widow talked about the devil. She spoke as if she had positively seen him."

"She didn't mean that; she meant she felt him within her like a thief in the dark, and that by the power of prayer she drove him away."

"Still, to one who, like myself, is in the habit of regarding Satan as a mere poetical personification of evil, her manner of speaking necessarily seemed excessively odd."

"Ah! to make people believe that he doesn't exist, is one of the wiles of the evil one. Nobody shall ever persuade me that there isn't a devil, because there *is*," Rotha almost hissed out the word *is*, and then compressed her lips firmly.

Arthur, looking at her face, saw in her a self-constituted little female pope who had just delivered an *ex cathedrâ* utterance. It was not his cue to make her angry, so he silently accepted her affirmation as irreformable. After a short pause, altogether dropping the subject of the devil, he said—

"I felt quite sorry for that unhappy girl troubled with blasphemous thoughts. It struck me that she had a strong family likeness to Mrs. Loothar: is she related to her?"

"Yes, certainly she is. She's Mrs. Loothar's daughter by a first husband, whose name was Cowper."

"Poor girl, she looks very ill."

"Yes, she's very ill, poor thing. She's a servant

at a lodging-house in London, but has been down here for some time for her mother to try and get her better. But I'm sorry to say she's worse instead of better than when she came, and yet she's got to go back to her place in London early to-morrow morning. A girl that she knew, who was out of place, went to the lodging-house for her temporarily ; but now that girl has got a place, and if Miss Cowper don't go back, she'll lose the place ; and, as she looks so ill, she's afraid no one else would take her as a servant. Besides, her mother is only a poor working woman, and can't afford to keep her daughter any longer at home."

"It's a sad case," said Arthur. Then, after a pause, he added, "She is evidently in a terribly hysterical state, and I am well able to sympathise with her ; for I, though a man, suffer from hysteria."

"Oh, you're always fancying, Mr. Howard, that you have got all sorts of things the matter with you, and I believe it's that keeps you from getting better."

"But I really am hysterical. Why, even when I was a schoolboy I used to laugh and cry at the same time, like an excitable girl. And I want you to think that I am hysterical, too, as I then could, I feel sure, make you think better of me."

"Think better of you for being hysterical? What nonsense !"

"Not nonsense at all. You heard Mr. Woods tell

that poor girl that the state of her mind was caused by bodily disorder. But hysteria causes not merely bad thoughts, but also depraved feelings. I heard the other day of a very religious young lady who, suffering from hysteria, loathes and detests her father—a father who has been to her the best, the kindest of fathers. Now, I am conscious that my moral feelings are in a depraved state; but if that is caused by hysteria, don't you think that is some excuse for me—that I am not nearly so wicked as I seem, when these diseased feelings lead me into wicked conduct; for I suppose I do seem very wicked to you?"

"Most *men* seem to me very wicked," said Rotha, evading a direct answer. Then, almost directly after, she added, "But if you can't help your feelings, you have your conscience to tell you what is right."

"Yes; but hysteria weakens the will. It cripples, if I may so speak, the legs of the soul, so that it cannot walk by itself, but needs to lean trustingly on another healthier soul, like some partially paralysed fellow-creature upon the arm of a friend. I wish that you would be such a friend to me: let me constitute you my external will for moral affairs."

"Very well, then, I shall throw away all the beer and gin that's left in the cupboard in your room," answered Rotha, who had read in teetotal books, and heard at teetotal lectures, how drink enfeebles the

will, and who therefore concluded it must be a very bad thing indeed for *hysterical* people to take.

Arthur was somewhat taken back by Rotha's practical manner of accepting his proposal, but he simply replied, "Ye-es, do so, if you like."

A few minutes after, they arrived at Daisy Cottage.

"I think I shall take half an hour's walk before I come in," said Arthur, as he stopped outside the garden gate. "It has turned out quite fine after the rain." The afternoon had been dull and wet, but the air was now clear, and the moon was shining brightly.

"You must take care of your throat, then," rejoined Rotha; "it's very windy."

"Yes; but it's not a nasty east wind. I like to take an evening walk, as it often helps to make me sleep at night."

"So it does me."

"But I suppose it is no use asking you to come with me: you're obliged to go in, are you not?"

"No; aunt is out helping in the kitchen at Mount Lebanon House, where she goes often to work in the laundry, you know. There's a grand party there to-night—the new people that have got it are very gay. Aunt won't be home till to-morrow evening, as they'll want her to help clear up after the party, and the laundry-maid told her that she might have half her bed to-night."

"Well, come with me, then."

"If you wouldn't rather go by yourself, I should like to."

"I should be very pleased for you to come with me."

"Then I'll come; but I'll just run in first and look to the fires." So saying, Rotha unlocked the cottage door and went in. In a few minutes she came back to Arthur, who was sauntering up and down in the road.

"Your fire has quite gone out," she said; "but ours is all right. I have made it up with small bits of coke—aunt mostly burns coke—so that there will be a nice fire for you to warm yourself by, if you're cold when we come in; and while you're doing so, I can relight yours, if you want it relit."

"Really, you're as good as your word, and are quite a mother to me."

Rotha looked pleased, and took Arthur's offered arm. They went off together in the opposite direction to that in which they had just come—Arthur marching along with an unusually elastic step. Amused at his uncommon sprightliness, Rotha, after a few minutes, said to him, laughing—

"I suppose if I were to ask you how you feel now, you would not say, as you often do, 'Flabby as a damp seaweed'?"

"No, I don't feel flabby at all at present ; I think there must be a great deal of electricity in the air this evening—I mean a very high tide of positive electricity ; but most likely you do not know anything about electric tides ?"

"No, I don't," replied Rotha ; "but when I was in London, I was once electrified at the Polytechnic."

"Just so. Then you have a good idea of what a powerful thing electricity is. But as to electric tides in the air, there are two of them every day. The morning tide is at the greatest height between nine and twelve o'clock, and the evening one between six and nine. There is, probably, an extraordinarily high one, at its greatest height at the present moment, and that powerfully stimulates the flaccid fibres of my body."

"I wonder how people can think of such things," said Rotha. "Do you know what aunt says about your reading so much ?"

"No ; tell me."

"You mustn't be offended, then."

"Oh, no, I promise you that I won't."

"She says, if you don't give up everlastingly *fustling* by yourself over a lot of *smelly* old books, the end of it will be that you'll read yourself silly."

"*Smelly* old books !" exclaimed Arthur ; "*smelly*, indeed ! What a ridiculously improper word for

your aunt to make use of! It is a prostitution of language; my books don't smell." Arthur was proud of his collection of books, that consisted of about three hundred volumes of English and French classics, a dozen or two works on modern science, Chambers's Encyclopædia, and various dictionaries. Amongst the collection were many with bindings worn and torn; but though some might be in bad odour with the religious world, none, he knew, were actually offensive to the nose. To assert the contrary, he indignantly thought, was to libel his best friends. He waited a few moments, hoping that Rotha would volunteer an acknowledgment that his books did not smell; but, to his annoyance, she remained silent, so he said to her—

"Now, do my books smell, Rotha?"

"Well, Mr. Howard, I must say that some of them really *do* smell."

"Which of them, I should like to know?"

"Well, it was that lot of foreign books that I noticed as smelling badly the day I decorated your room for Christmas. I mean those that have got 'Voltaire' on the backs of many of them."

As she spoke, the bright moonlight enabled Arthur to see that her nose was turned up, and that her mouth and entire face expressed just such disgust as an offensive odour would excite.

"They smell only in your imagination, Rotha," he said, very decidedly, in answer to her assertion. "As a Methodist, you have been taught to regard Voltaire with contempt and disgust. Your aunt's words directed those feelings of your mind to your olfactory nerves, and you then had an ugly nasal spectre, a horrid apparition of a smell, as you looked at the books."

Rotha did not reply ; she did not quite understand him. Arthur felt that for such a trifling matter he was unduly annoyed. When suffering from morbid nervous irritation, he usually sought to carry it off by sharp muscular exercise. Applying this remedy on the present occasion, he so quickened his pace as to make it difficult for Rotha to keep up with him. But, for fear of vexing him, Rotha did not like to complain, and refrained from doing so even when after a while it had become positively distressing to her to keep on at such a pace. As they were going down hill, they got so rapidly over the ground that they arrived at a farmhouse that Arthur knew to be two miles from Daisy Cottage before he had any idea of having gone so far. Recognising the house, he stopped, and said to Rotha—

"I suppose we had better think about turning back." And then, for the first time noticing her breathless state, he added, "But how you're panting ! I'm

afraid that I have been walking a great deal too fast for you."

"I have a weak heart," gasped Rotha; "and then your legs are so much longer than mine."

"Yes, they are indeed; I'm little else than a pair of long legs. As a baby, I was more the shape of a pair of tongs than a human being. But how very selfish of me to have forgotten that it must distress you to walk as quickly as myself. Stand quietly for a minute or two, to regain your breath, and then we will take it easy in walking back."

"I am not very well this evening," said Rotha; "I had a very bad night's rest last night. When anything once thoroughly wakes me up, I often can't get to sleep again at all, and I couldn't last night."

"I hope that you'll sleep better to-night. Most likely you'll be sleepy after your walk."

"And I hope that you will be so too, then you won't sit up late—*reading*."

"Are you not afraid," quickly rejoined Arthur, "that you may take cold if we stand still talking any longer?"

"I do feel the wind rather cold," replied Rotha, smiling. "I'm ready to go on when you like."

They immediately bent their steps homewards. But their way was uphill, and a boisterous westerly wind blew almost directly in their faces. "Taking

it easy" in walking back they found to be quite impracticable. When they had been about half an hour on their way home, Rotha complained of being giddy and faint, and Arthur had the greatest difficulty in getting her along. At length they arrived at Daisy Cottage, and Rotha then felt so poorly that, on entering the room into which the front door opened (of which she had the key), she, like a half-dead thing, flung herself upon an old couch which stood under the window. Arthur lit a candle, and was alarmed when he saw the deadly pallor of her face. As he looked at her she fainted.

He dashed cold water in her face, carried her into the open air; but all he did was to no purpose. He began to fear that she might be suffering from something worse than a mere fainting fit, and felt quite at a loss what to do for the best. The cottage standing alone, there was no next-door neighbour for him to seek the aid of. In his perplexity he remembered once having been told by a young surgeon of a youth who, after remaining insensible for several hours, in spite of the application of various remedies, regained consciousness when a teacupful of brandy was poured down his throat. He had not any brandy in the house, but he resolved at once to try, instead of it, the effect of some of his gin upon Rotha, for he felt sure that she had not had time to carry out the

arrangement about throwing it and the bottled beer away when she ran into the house just to look at the fires while he was waiting outside. Carrying Rotha back from the garden into the sitting-room on the ground floor, he laid her down carefully upon the old couch. Then, going upstairs and looking into the cupboard in his own sitting-room, he found its contents just as he had left them. Taking out the gin-bottle, that had still some spirit left in it, he hurried downstairs with it to find, when he got to Rotha's side, that he had forgotten to bring a glass. He ran into the kitchen, seized the nearest teacup, ran back into the sitting-room, and, after excitedly brimming up the cup with gin, poured some portion of it down Rotha's throat.

While anxiously watching the effect of the spirit upon her, Arthur's conduct supplied a striking illustration how actions, seemingly guided by intelligence and will, may in reality be automatic. With him the possession and presence of spirits, and a drinking vessel together, had been habitually accompanied by a certain set of movements. These, simply through compound reflex action of the nervous system, now repeated themselves. *His hands* refilled the cup with gin, and emptied it down his own throat. Reason played no part in the matter; the attention of Arthur's mind at the time was wholly concentrated upon Rotha.

His fears, however, about his little patient were soon allayed. Under the potent influence of the spirit she quickly revived—revived, though, for Arthur to perceive that he had, unintentionally, made her rather tipsy. But the pleasing sense of being relieved from an anxious responsibility, combined with the stimulating effect of the gin that he had drunk, caused him to be rather amused than troubled at noticing this.

“ Oh, Mr. Howard, I’m so giddy ! What *had* I better do ? ” said Rotha, looking up at Arthur with imploring helplessness.

“ I’ll run up and fetch my bottle of eau de Cologne,” answered Arthur. “ The smell of eau de Cologne is very refreshing. I think, too, that if I were to well wet your handkerchief with some, and apply it to your temples and forehead, that will very likely do you good.”

Rotha gladly agreeing, Arthur very quickly made trial of his suggested remedy, using all the eau de Cologne that he had in doing so, and with a very gratifying result. The sopped handkerchief held to her throbbing temples and forehead, manifestly, after a while, from the changed appearance of her face, gave her great relief.

“ I hope that it has done you good ? ” asked Arthur, when all his eau de Cologne was gone from the bottle,

and Rotha's handkerchief was dry from its rapid evaporation.

"O yes, I feel much better—much more comfortable than I was just now; but I still feel very funny—oh, so funny!—I feel as if I must laugh; but I don't know what I have to laugh at just now, I'm sure."

"Never mind, laugh away at nothing, or laugh at me. Think about my reminding you of that pantaloons that you have told me I often do." Saying this, Arthur pulled one of those doleful faces that Rotha never could behold and remain serious.

She burst out laughing boisterously now, and kept on doing so, as if she was never going to stop; Arthur finding amusement in trying to provoke her to continue to do so by staring at her with an as utterly unmoved countenance as if his face had been but a dismal mask.

"I *will* make you laugh, too, before I've done, Mr. Pantaloons," said Rotha, who was still rather tipsy, and then proceeding to make a succession of comical grimaces, laughing all the while. "Ah! now I see your moustache moving," she added presently; "you can't keep your laughter down any longer. It's only just inside your lips, and is shaking them so that it must soon force its way out." Then, deciding that the moment had come for a supreme effort to be

made to conquer Arthur's obstinately-assumed lugubriousness, the excited girl made such an overpowering display of infectious hilarity, that it proved quite irresistible even to Arthur, and caused him heartily to follow her example, relishing his defeat as something delicious. That heedless, sweet abandonment to the joy of the moment, that merely in an ideal way he had so often delighted in, through the aid of Poussin's "Bacchanalian Dance," he now momentarily tasted in reality to an extent that he had never done before in his life. He now revelled in his novel experience, like some youngster who, through there being a wedding-breakfast in his family, tastes champagne for the first time.

* * * * *

That night a pure maiden having been, by a magic potion given her while swooning, transformed into a Bacchante, fell a prey to a foul Satyr. That night Arthur Howard slunk to bed with the consciousness that he was a villain.

CHAPTER XII.

A HAPPY ORGANISATION.

OF the many places within a few miles of London that Nature has richly endowed with beauty, Richmond is indisputably the queen. In May and June Richmond Hill is a Paradise. Then the admiring spectator, as he stands on the far-famed Terrace Walk and looks on the rich pasture-land that, sloping down from the crest of the Hill and stretching out beyond its base, forms, to some considerable extent, the foreground of the view, and contemplates the cattle enjoying the bounteous feast that has been spread for them, may well be reminded of the words of the Hebrew poet, "Thy clouds drop fatness." Then as he looks beyond on that grand array of trees that constitutes one of the distinguishing features of the landscape, their luxuriant foliage beautifully hides from his view all unsightly interferences of man with Nature in their midst. Pleasingly he is tempted to fancy that, though but a few miles from the vastest forest of chimneys in the world, he is yet gazing upon

a magnificent primeval forest of trees, with a meandering river losing itself in the unsullied recesses of that forest.

And at that lovely season, should he find that at noon the sunny Terrace Walk, sheltered as it is except to the south and to the west, becomes warmer than is agreeable to him, he may enjoy delicious invigorating breezes in Richmond's noble park, on the undulating sward of which graceful deer are skipping playfully about, while the fluttering leaves of its beech-trees seem to have burst into joyous song from the many birds carolling hidden on their branches. Nor when the sun has passed away to cheer and vivify less highly-favoured spots by his glorious light and heat is Richmond Park closed, as are some other public parks. On foot, whosoever will may contemplate its sylvan scenery bathed in the silver light of the moon, and listen to its nightingales warbling their sweet songs of love.

Seeing all this, what wonder that Richmond has long been famous for subtly disposing human hearts to succumb to the sweet influences of love? What wonder that many a man, believing himself to possess a glacial heart, against the hard ice of which Cupid's arrows must ever strike but to rebound with blunted points, should, after breathing for a little while the enchanting air of Richmond, have felt his

frozen heart gently thawed to tenderness and warmth, and an arrow from the bow of the God of Love pierce it so deeply, that soon (a sweet nurse robed in white, and crowned with orange blossoms, having consented to tend its wound) the melodious bells of Richmond old church should be set ringing far-resounding peals of joy over yet another bachelor redeemed from the error of his ways? Some warmly eulogistic words addressed by Lord Byron to another beautiful spot may indeed appropriately be also applied to Richmond :—

“Clarens ! sweet Clarens, birthplace of deep love !
Thine air is the young breath of passionate thought ;
Thy trees take root in love.”

But justly celebrated as Richmond has always been for its delicious air, it was not until recently that it was equally blessed in the way of water. Now, however, it has an abundant and pure supply, thanks to the public spirit and energy of some of its inhabitants. As before this great benefit was conferred upon it it was remarkable for its salubrity, it may be anticipated that henceforth its death-rate will become even ridiculously low. Will it, perhaps, become nothing unusual for a Richmondite to rival the longevity of Old Parr ? or may still more extravagant hopes be indulged in ? About Malvern, in Worcestershire,

famous too for its fine air and pure water, there is a saying:—

“Round about the Malvern Hills
A man may live as long as he wills.”

In the time to come shall the same thing be also said of the neighbourhood of lovely Richmond Hill?

Whether, however, that may be so or not, the advantages of living at Richmond are so manifestly great, that its numerous detached and semi-detached villas are eagerly sought after as residences. New ones are continuously being erected to continuously find tenants or purchasers, and this often while they are only partially built. Hence it results that, for its size, the town supports an extraordinary number of house agents, whose offices for the most part are within a few minutes' walk of the railway station. Of the more select-looking of these, that of Mr. William Brown, brother to Mr. Peter Brown, of Reading, stands pre-eminent.

It was about half-past three of the day following that on which occurred what has been related in the last chapter that the front door of this office was opened, and the doorway almost completely filled up by a portly old gentleman with very white hair and a very red and good-humoured looking face—a face that, in regard to its owner's life, seemed to be saying for him, “I have had a very jolly time of it, and I should

like to have it over again." This portly old gentleman was Mr. William Brown himself. Having on his hat and overcoat, and holding his gloves in one hand, it seemed as if he was about to come out; but instead of doing so he remained standing still in the doorway, looking, with slightly eager expectancy, in the direction of the railway station. After having done so for a few minutes, he turned round and looked at the clock inside the office, and then said to the clerk there—

"I think it will be of no use my waiting any longer. Mr. Howard has evidently not come by the 8.30 train."

"This clock is a minute or two fast, I fancy," replied the clerk.

"Is it?" rejoined Mr. Brown, unbuttoning his overcoat and pulling out a handsome gold watch from his waistcoat pocket. "Ah! by my watch it is a minute or so fast. I'll wait, then, just a little bit longer."

Mr. William Brown had written the evening before to his brother, Mr. Peter Brown, of Reading, stating that he would be glad if Mr. Howard could undertake to make an inventory and valuation for him that had to be done in a great hurry, his permanent clerk being otherwise engaged. Mr. William Brown knew Arthur from having seen him once or twice at his brother's

offices at Reading. The inventory referred to was to be begun, if possible, at ten o'clock the next morning. As there were various matters connected with it to be talked over beforehand, Mr. William Brown wished Mr. Howard, if he conveniently could, to come over the previous afternoon, and dine with him in the evening. In reply to his letter he had received a telegram from his brother, simply saying, "Mr. Howard will come."

Mr. William Brown had waited but a very few minutes longer, after having spoken as has just been stated, when Arthur, travelling-bag in hand, entered the office. After having expressed himself as very glad at the arrival of Mr. Howard, Mr. Brown proceeded to inform him that the job for which he needed his services was to make an inventory and valuation of fitted furniture arranged to be taken by the incoming tenant—Mr. Barabbas, of the bill-discounting firm of Judas, Barabbas, & Co.—of a house at Richmond that he had just let on lease as agent of Lord Des Larmes, and possession of which ought to have been given at Christmas, but that, through unforeseen circumstances occurring, had not yet been given. He was about to meet Lord Des Larmes by appointment at the house where the valuation was to be made, and would be glad to inform his lordship decisively that Mr. Howard would be there without

fail by ten the next morning to begin the inventory. Arthur having replied that he would be quite prepared to do so, Mr. Brown asked Mr. Howard to excuse him from saying more at that moment, as he feared Lord Des Larmes might be kept waiting for him at the house referred to. "I have made arrangements that you, while at Richmond, shall board and lodge with myself," he said, and gave Arthur the address of the private house where he lived. "At half-past six," he added, "we will dine together, and afterwards pass a comfortable evening by the fire-side, and talk over the business of to-morrow. There will be only our two selves, as my wife is away staying on a visit. The housemaid at my private residence will show you your room on your mentioning your name." So saying, Mr. Brown hurriedly left the office.

The clerk in the office having directed Arthur the nearest way to Mr. William Brown's private house, Arthur set out for it immediately, to deposit his travelling-bag in the room allotted to him.

He was not sorry that business had called him away for a day or so from Daisy Cottage, for the sight of him seemed to greatly aggravate the distress of the grief-stricken Rotha. His absence from home for a short time might, he hoped, conduce to her attaining some degree of mental calm. By her own

wish he had left it to her to speak first to her aunt about the offer of marriage that he had made to her.

But an aching conscience made him ill at ease. Though a bright fire was burning in the room that had been prepared for him at Mr. William Brown's private house, he felt too restless to remain there more than a minute or two, and then went out for a walk. He walked first up to the Terrace on Richmond Hill. But as it was after four o'clock when he got there, and the sun had set, he could not see much of the celebrated view from it. Passing from the hill into the park, he went along Beech Walk, and so on to the Ham Gate. There leaving the park, he crossed Ham Common, until he reached the Kingston Road, by which he returned to Richmond.

The open-air exercise helped to give him an appetite that enabled him to do justice to the very substantial dinner to which, at half-past six, he sat down with Mr. William Brown. He also felt encouraged to indulge freely in the good things provided by the very jovial and friendly manners of his host, in whom he was now satisfied that he saw one of those fortunately organised individuals who are able to make a pleasure of almost everything. As Arthur looked at him he remembered and no longer doubted a story relating to a funeral that he had to perform that his brother at Reading was fond of

telling about him. More than half the appointed mourners were prevented attending it from injuries received in a railway accident the evening before. Lord Des Larmes, the brother of the deceased, thereupon asked Mr. William Brown to take one of the vacant places in the coaches as a mourner. Mr. Brown replied, "Certainly, my lord; I'll mourn with pleasure, my lord."

On taking his place at the dinner-table, Arthur poured himself out a glass of water, fully determined not to take any of the wine or beer that he saw there, however much his host might press him to do so. He endeavoured to put himself in a mood in which strong pressure to make him yield in this matter should only excite his obstinacy. Mr. Brown, however, did not press him strongly, and yet somehow, before dinner was half over, he, by his seductive geniality, caused Arthur's unyielding resolution to melt away, just as ice that might prove strong enough to resist the pressure of a heavy weight is rapidly dissolved when exposed to the glow of sunshine. When Arthur left the table he had a pint of pale ale and two glasses of sherry busily doing their best within him to cheer him up. The result was that these stimulants, working in conjunction with Mr. Brown's jovial manners and conversation, led Arthur, not indeed to forget the trouble that he had brought upon

himself, but to think much more lightly of it than before.

"Have a cigar?" said Mr. Brown, holding out his cigar-case towards Arthur, as they sat, each occupying a comfortable easy chair, by the side of the fire, after the dinner-things had been cleared away.

"Thank you, I never smoke."

"Will it be unpleasant to you if *I* smoke?"

"Not at all: I rather like the smell of a good cigar."

"Why don't you smoke?" asked Mr. Brown, as he lit a cigar for himself.

"On account of the state of my health. I am always more in need of a tonic than a narcotic."

Enjoying his cigar, Mr. Brown took a leisurely survey of Arthur's person. Presently, taking his cigar out of his mouth, he said—

"I must say you *are* terribly pale and thin. Can't the doctors do anything for you?"

"It seems not, for I have tried a great many of them. To cure my paleness, I have taken enough iron to manufacture any quantity of red blood corpuscles. To put some flesh on my bones, I have swallowed gallons of cod-liver oil, both pale and light-brown, as well as lots of other dear and nasty things, including that most sickening of medicinal abominations, the pancreatic emulsion of fat."

“ And I suppose you have been advised to live well too ? ”

“ O yes ; to eat meat three times a day, mixing calves’ gastric juice with my own to digest it.”

“ How changed medical treatment is to what it used to be ! People, at all events, can’t complain of its being lowering nowadays.”

“ No ; but they have good reason to complain of physicians going to the extreme the other way. Take my case, for instance. My body may be compared to a steam factory in which the engine is terribly out of repair. What is it that these clever doctors advise should be done under these circumstances ? That the factory should be crammed to the roof with raw materials for fabrication, and the engine given double work to do ! ”

“ There’s as much absurd fashion in doctoring as in dress,” rejoined Mr. Brown.

“ There is indeed. The bleeding and starvation of invalids used to be the favourite mode of ensuring a good supply of corpses for the undertakers ; now it is the fashion to attain the same end by stuffing the sick like Strasbourg geese or prize pigs. I don’t wonder that many a despairing dyspeptic should seek relief from such treatment in a water-cure establishment, though there may be danger of that proving only a half-way house to a lunatic asylum.”

"Have you ever tried the cold-water cure?"

"No; I don't think that there is sufficient power of reaction in my feeble body for the water-cure to do for me."

"My idea is that it *would* do for you. But I think I know what would be better for you than all the doctoring in the world: get married. You have done well to come and live in the country; but for a man to try living in the country without a wife is to make a great mistake."

"I *am* seriously thinking about getting married. But suppose I should marry, and then find out afterwards that, like the pancreatic emulsion of fat, marriage disagreed with me extremely; I should still be obliged to continue 'the medicine as before.'"

"Certainly the physic that I recommend you to take has that peculiar disadvantage," said Mr. Brown, laughing.

"And then," continued Arthur, "what young woman could like a cadaverous, miserable-looking fellow—a mere living skeleton, such as I am—for a husband?" The idea that Rotha had now taken a deep aversion to him, as he judged that she had done from her manner towards him, was rankling in his mind. Hitherto her feeling towards him, he now thought he saw, must have been much like that of a young maiden sister for a kind elder brother. That

elder brother, he felt painfully convinced, was now transformed in his sister's eyes into an object of loathing and contempt.

"Your portrait of yourself, my young friend, is too extravagant," said Mr. Brown, in reply to Arthur's last remark. "It happens that I have heard of one young lady who regards you with a favouring eye. To her your delicate looks, instead of being objectionable, make you appear interesting."

"Indeed!"

"She thinks that you are too fond of study, and, to use her own words, that 'the flesh of your body has been consumed by the too frequent burning of the midnight lamp.'"

"Rather by burning my consumable body itself as the wick of a spirit-lamp," thought Arthur, though of course he did not say so aloud. Yet, notwithstanding this reflection, Mr. Brown's words made him as pleased as a cat that is stroked caressingly. In indolent enjoyment he sat gazing at the fire, mentally purring.

As he thus sat, and before he had thought of what he should say in reply to Mr. Brown, a servant entered and placed hot water and tumblers upon the table. Mr. Brown then produced a bottle of Scotch whiskey out of the sideboard, and mixed two stiff glasses of whiskey and water, one for Arthur and the other for himself.

While they were both regaling themselves with their hot grog, Mr. Brown talked to Arthur about the business on which he had come to Richmond. Having given him all necessary information and instructions upon the subject, Mr. Brown then said—

“Well, now I think we may dismiss business from our minds till to-morrow. As an interesting subject, suppose we resume our conversation upon marriage. Did you think I was merely joking in what I said to you a little while ago?”

“No; I thought that perhaps there might be something in it.”

“I assure you that it is a positive fact that I *do* know a young lady, and a very nice young lady too, in whose good graces you have had the good fortune to ingratiate yourself. She thinks you wonderfully intelligent, and describes you as being ‘all mind.’”

“But it does not at all follow that she would be willing to marry me, unless she is a very peculiar young lady indeed.”

“She is a very peculiar young lady—one not at all suited to marry a man who thinks that woman’s mission consists only in making puddings and pies, and that sort of thing.”

“Have you any objection to tell me who this very remarkable young lady is?”

“You have no suspicion, then?”

"Well, I think I can guess."

"Probably, then, I shall not surprise you when I tell you that she is my niece Ianthe."

"No; I fancied it was to her that you referred. I wonder that she has not got married before this, as her father is well off, and she his only child."

"It is rather strange; but I believe that the eligible young men of Reading have been frightened of her, it having, I understand, somehow got about that she is very strong on the woman's rights question."

"And you think that on that point rumour wrongs her?"

"I fancy so; I think that she has only taken up the subject as an amusement. If I thought that she was seriously infected with that mania, she would not be such a favourite of mine as she is."

"You don't believe in 'woman's rights,' then?"

"Not a bit of it. What is your opinion upon the matter?"

"Well," answered Arthur, whom the hot grog, taken on the top of the pale ale and sherry, had slightly elevated—"well, I sympathise to a certain extent with the women in their claims. It appears to me, for instance, that they have a perfect right to smoke cigarettes—the act of lightly puffing out a stream of smoke is so admirably becoming to their mouths. But I can't say the same for the issue of

men's slang from them. And as for according women the use of latch-keys, that is not to be thought of: do so, and the history of the decline and fall of modern civilisation might then be begun to be written at once."

"Hear, hear," rejoined Mr. Brown. "But as regards my niece Ianthe, I don't think that any man need fear her as being too strong-minded a woman for a wife. And she is becoming a little anxious to change her name, if at all a suitable husband for her offers himself, because she thinks my brother has serious ideas about marrying again. Naturally, his daughter would not like to live in a subordinate position in the home where she has been mistress—perhaps I ought to say the spoilt mistress—so long. That she has taken quite a fancy to you I learn from my wife, who is a great friend of hers. I think if you were to propose to her, going about it in the right way, that you would be accepted. And for my part I think it would be about the best thing that you could do. It would be much better for you to be married than to go on living alone, studying to find out the origin of evil."

"Studying to find out the origin of evil!" exclaimed Arthur, in surprise. "I assure you that you are greatly mistaken in thinking that I am studying that."

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure," rejoined Mr. Brown.

"My niece the other day spoke of your doing so as a well-known fact. I thought that you had most likely told her that you were doing so yourself."

"Not at all. She must have strangely misconstrued something that I have said to her. I have remarked before that she appears to labour under an absurd idea that there is something darkly mysterious about the way I spend my time when alone."

"Still," said Mr. Brown, "as that idea makes you appear interesting in her eyes, there's no reason for you to let its being inaccurate trouble you, or stand in the way of your making love to her—quite the contrary."

"But of course before deciding upon taking such a step as you suggest, it would be necessary for me to give it the most serious consideration," replied Arthur, looking at the fire meditatively. As Rotha, he thought, seemed now to regard him with loathing and contempt, *might* she not prefer some form of his condoning the wrong he had done her other than marrying her?

"There are many things, no doubt, to be considered before coming to any conclusion in the matter," said Mr. Brown; "but I do not see any monetary difficulties in the way of your marriage with my niece. You have lately acquired house property at Reading, my brother tells me, that will bring you in several

hundreds a year, and that is likely to greatly increase in value. My brother, I should suppose, would settle about three thousand pounds upon his daughter at her marriage, in addition to a villa that, after a design of hers, he is about to commence building, and which, by-the-by, is, I understand, to be erected on ground adjoining the garden of the cottage where you live."

"Yes. The men, I see, have already begun to dig out the ground in order to lay the foundation."

"Have they? I was not aware of that; but I heard that the contract for building it had at length been made with an eminent builder. Of course you have seen the water-colour drawing in my brother's office of what the villa is to be like. Very extraordinary design, is it not, for a young lady to have made entirely by herself?"

"Very extraordinary indeed," echoed Arthur.

"We—I mean all her relations and friends," continued Mr. Brown—"think it quite a masterpiece. She must possess quite a genius for that sort of thing—don't you think so?"

"Quite. The grand characteristic of genius is originality, and I most certainly have never seen a design for a house more truly original than that of Miss Brown—never in the whole course of my life."

Indulging in a favourite affectation of his, Arthur as he spoke the last words put on an expression of

face that was more suited to a patriarch than a young man in his thirty-first year.

"I suppose you have heard from my niece that her villa is to have a model studio?"

"O yes, Miss Brown has told me all about it; and she tells me that she has decided to call the house Raphael Lodge."

"Indeed! She had not quite made up her mind what name she would give it when I saw her last, but had some idea of calling it Michel—of calling it Michel——" Mr. Brown muttered some unintelligible words, and cast upon Arthur an oblivious look. He was in the habit of having a nap after dinner, and now the effects of what he had eaten and drunk, combined with those of the bright fire, made the inclination to indulge once again in that habit irresistible. Politeness, however, caused him to make a desperate struggle to appear awake. In this struggle his eyelids reminded Arthur of outside shutters that, continually being forced open, continually closed to again—only revealing in the intervals of being open that the inside blinds were down.

Politeness is infectious. Arthur lolled back in his easy chair and closed his eyes as if dozing himself. Soon after he had the pleasure of hearing that his host was in a state of snoring bliss.

But Arthur felt no inclination really to go to sleep

just then, for what had been said to him about Miss Brown had set him thinking. "Should I marry her," he thought, "I should no doubt be taken into partnership by her father. He is getting an old man, and his retirement or death is not unlikely to take place before very many years are over: the business then might become entirely mine. When he dies, even though he should leave a wife, a large proportion of his considerable property would doubtlessly be left to his daughter, as she is his only child. His widow he would most likely merely leave a life-interest in a portion of his property that after her death would go to his daughter, for it is highly improbable that at his age he would have any more children. Thus an opportunity of probably becoming rich is temptingly offered to me." Thinking in this way, he inwardly bitterly cursed his own mad folly for having thrown difficulties in the way of his realising this golden future.

But he was not in the mood for protracted brooding on the dark side of things in relation to his own fate. His thoughts soon slid round to their brighter side, and dwelt pleasantly upon the *possibility* of his ultimately marrying Miss Brown, notwithstanding the unfortunate obstacle that at present stood in the way of his doing so. *Assuming*, then, that before long, through Rotha assenting to some arrangement which would enable him to begin courting Miss Brown, in

what sort of fashion should he set about that ticklish task? For Miss Brown, he felt assured, would not like to be courted in a common-place way—would be very likely to be annoyed if proposed to in such a manner. He remembered how he had once quite vexed her through recommending a certain book to her as being one admirably suited for the perusal of young ladies. “It is a book, I believe,” she answered, “well suited for the perusal of *ordinary* young ladies,” at the same time drawing herself up and eyeing Arthur in a way that seemed to say, “Do you not, then, perceive, sir, that you are talking to an *extraordinary* young lady?” In wooing her he perceived then that he must take care to humour her peculiarities, and after meditating for a while he came to a definite conclusion as to the way he would go about it.

He would, he thought, begin by making a confession to her, in confidence, that before he knew her he *had*, presumptuously, addicted himself to nocturnal studies of a mysterious and forbidden character. This would be equivalent to declaring that she was right in her surmise about his being “a martyr to the midnight lamp,” and would be an indirect mode of flattering her for her sagacity. Making use of magniloquent language, he would speak of himself as an impious man who had had the audacity to imitate the sublime impiety of Prometheus, and who suffered in consequence a Promethean doom. He would

appeal to her compassion by figuratively representing himself as chained helplessly on a miserable rock, isolated in the ocean of existence, with the vulture of despair ever gnawing at his heart of hearts. And he would further say to her that in her he recognised a mighty enchantress who could if she would reverse his cruel fate. Looking into the near heaven of her eyes, he would tell her, had kindled a fire in his heart that he felt to be divine—had convinced him that he had been a visionary and a lunatic for seeking in the clouds celestial fire—had revealed to him that the true heavenly fire for him was that of the domestic hearth, of a domestic hearth the sacred flames of which were kept brightly burning by such a wife as he knew that she would make. The potent magic of her smiles, he would assure her, could change his soul's unrest and gloom to peace and joy, and transform a world that had hitherto been to him a howling wilderness into a laughing paradise. "Let me, then," he would finally propose to her, "clasp you to my heart as the missing better half of my being, as that more spiritual half, to exist separated from which is ever to be tormented with the bitter sense of living a frustrated life. As his guardian angel, consent to grace the home of one that Nature has expressly formed to appreciate you, and who gratefully in return would render you a lifelong worship."

Thus tossing and whirling about fine words as a juggler does golden balls, his mind became quite dazzled with its own dexterity. And as he thought of the effect such language would probably have upon the spoilt girl to whom it was to be addressed, he smiled complacently. His inordinate vanity did not permit him to doubt that his eloquence would succeed in sufficiently fascinating her to make her willing to seek refuge in his arms from the dreaded mother-in-law.

In this complacent frame of mind he continued, indolently reclining in his luxurious easy chair, and presently the glowing warmth of the bright fire caused him also to feel drowsy. And as he made no effort to throw off his drowsiness, but left it to pursue its sweet aggressiveness upon his senses unchecked, he before long fell as fast asleep as Mr. Brown.

After they had both remained soundly sleeping for some time, the fire having gone nearly out caused a change of temperature that, in conjunction with the clock on the mantelshelf striking eleven, awoke Mr. Brown. Seeing that it was time to go to bed, he, as his servants had retired for the night, fetched another jug of hot water himself from the kitchen boiler, brewed two stiff glasses of whiskey-and-water, and then aroused Arthur. Guest and host then each took his steaming "nightcap," and immediately after went to bed.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CHARMING BIJOU VILLA.

THE inventory and valuation of fitted furniture that Arthur had agreed to make for Mr. William Brown took him, as he had been led to expect, a day and a half to do. On the completion of the job he at once went with his work to the office. There he found that a letter had just been received, enclosing some accounts, from Lord Des Larmes. These showed that some of the principal pieces of furniture to be purchased by Mr. Barabbas had cost much more new than Arthur or Mr. Brown had imagined. Owing to this, Mr. Brown directed Arthur not to commence adding up the valuation at once, as it might be necessary, he apprehended, to revise the prices of some of the items. It being then close upon the time for lunch, Mr. Brown thought, however, it best to get that repast over before going into the matter. He and Arthur accordingly proceeded to refresh themselves, in the private office, with sandwiches and pale ale. Lunch over, Arthur immediately placed the

valuation-book before him on the pedestal writing-table, and looked at Mr. Brown, who sat facing him, for instructions, when they were interrupted by the entry of the permanent clerk.

He had, he said, a lady, a Mrs. De Vere, of Brighton, in the front office, who had come for an order to view No. 1, Queen's Villas, which he had given her; but as she mentioned that she knew his brother at Reading, he thought probably Mr. Brown would like to speak to her.

"Certainly I should," said Mr. Brown; "pray show her in."

Arthur rose to leave the office.

"Don't go away, Mr. Howard; I have nothing particular to say to the lady. I sha'n't be but a minute or two. While I am speaking to her, turn and see what prices we have put to the pair of carved walnut cabinets, and to the gilt console table and glass in the drawing-room." Mr. Brown had attended himself at Lord Des Larmes', and arranged with Arthur about the prices he was to put to many of the principal items in the inventory.

Arthur resumed his seat, to do as he was directed.

"Good-morning, madam; I am proud to have the honour of making your acquaintance," said Mr. Brown, standing up and bowing as Mrs. De Vere was shown into his private office. "Pray be seated, madam."

"Ah, I see that you have heard of me from your brother, Mr. Brown of Reading," replied Mrs. De Vere, as she sat down. "I am happy to believe both he and his daughter now regard me as a dear friend; though it is only recently that we became acquainted—that is, only this winter, at Brighton, as I daresay you are aware."

"Yes, I have heard so from my brother, madam. Charming place, Brighton."

"Oh, delightful! so *distingué*. It is the West-end of London, you know, with the sea for Hyde Park."

"But it would be rather monotonous to live there always; one likes to see the green fields and trees sometimes. After Brighton, Richmond, in the spring, is a delightful place."

"That is why I am thinking of taking a house here. At present I am in' apartments in Park Terrace here, but I like the position of No. 1, Queen's Villas. I presume that you consider it to be in the most *distingué* part of Richmond, do you not?"

"Certainly, madam; it is only a few minutes' walk from the Star and Garter, and on a fine day you can see Windsor Castle from the top front bedroom window."

"Only fancy; how very nice! But now tell me, Mr. Brown—you know one hears of such dreadful

things happening from faulty drains—is the drainage of this house good?”

“Perfect—perfect, madam,” answered Mr. Brown, like a good house-agent, though he knew nothing whatever about the drainage of the house in question.

“I am so glad to hear that. And I presume that you consider Richmond a healthy place? Certainly, if one may judge from *your* looks, Mr. Brown, if you’re an old resident here, Richmond must be a *very* healthy place.”

“I am happy to be able to say, madam, that I—myself, personally—have found the air here agree with me marvellously well; in fact, I may say, coming to live here five-and-twenty years ago saved my life. I am not speaking, you understand, as a mere ordinary house-agent, anxious only about his commission,” continued Mr. Brown, looking at Mrs. De Vere as if he felt for her the disinterested affection of a parent; “no, we tell the truth here, madam.”

“Mr. Brown, it is not necessary to tell me that,” rejoined Mrs. De Vere, with rather a sweet smile of trustfulness, as if his belonging to the Brown family was quite sufficient guarantee of his veracity.

“Speaking as a friendly and confidential adviser, I recommend you strongly to go and look at No. 1, Queen’s Villas, madam. You will find it a most charming *bijou* villa, admirably adapted for the residence of a single lady of distinction.”

"I ought to have mentioned, Mr. Brown, that I have an unmarried daughter living with me."

"I am very happy to hear so, madam. I think a lady alone might be likely to find the house a trifle too large for her; it was, indeed, built expressly for a lady and her daughter. I now feel confident that there is not another house in Richmond so likely to suit you. For the moment I did not remember hearing my brother say that you had a daughter living with you."

"Your brother has not yet seen her, and very probably I may not have mentioned to him about her usually living with me. She has been staying on a long visit at the country mansion of some wealthy friends of ours, and has only just joined me at Richmond. Here she is, I think," said Mrs. De Vere, as some one was heard to enter the front office. "I left her choosing some Berlin wool at a shop close by, and appointed here for her to meet me."

"Miss De Vere," announced the permanent clerk, showing in the young lady, whose mamma immediately introduced her to Mr. Brown. After a few complimentary words, Mr. Brown expressed a hope that Miss De Vere liked Richmond.

"I don't care about it in the winter, but I like it very much at other times," she replied.

Arthur, whose back as he sat at the writing-table

was towards the last speaker, was struck with great surprise on hearing her voice. Where had he heard it before? He looked round at the speaker, and in her saw the young lady who, at the "Grapes" tavern, near Canterbury, had so forcibly struck him as resembling one of the Bacchantes in Poussin's "Bacchanalian Dance," and whose name, he now remembered, was De Vere. Not a month before he had heard from his friend Andrews that she then still held the situation of barmaid at the "Grapes." She was now quietly and even elegantly dressed, but there was no mistaking the face. Whether she at all recognised him or not Arthur was unable to tell; she gave no signs of doing so.

Almost directly after she had spoken she left with her companion, Mr. Brown accompanying them to the front door, exhorting them if they found No. 1, Queen's Villas, likely to suit, not to lose a moment in taking it, as he had dozens of inquirers after it, and it was rare that there was such a house to be let at Richmond.

Arthur was detained till five in the afternoon revising and adding up the valuation he had undertaken for Mr. William Brown. This done, he without delay returned to Reading.

CHAPTER XIV.

SELF-CONDEMNED.

ON his return home from Mr. William Brown's, at Richmond, Arthur had news that greatly surprised and distressed him—Rotha had run away from Daisy Cottage, and her aunt did not know where she had gone to. Mrs. Hogg's account of the circumstances connected with her niece's disappearance, as told to Arthur, were in substance as follows.

When she came home from Mount Lebanon House, on the evening of the day that Arthur left for Richmond, she found that Rotha had been greatly neglecting her work—the house generally was in a very untidy state, and the fire in the living-room was nearly out. Being herself in a cross mood from over-fatigue, she began to scold Rotha sharply. The latter, who seemed in a strangely upset condition, replied with sullen insolence, whereat Mrs. Hogg got still more provoked, and threatened to strike Rotha if she answered another word. Rotha then became sulkily silent, and so continued for an hour or so, her aunt,

meanwhile, on and off nagging at her. At length Mrs. Hogg saying to her niece, in a jeering way, that she believed young Wood's ranting about hell and the devil was sending her crazy, and that she was a great fool for running after a young man who made himself a great deal too free with all the girls at the chapel that would let him, Rotha became terribly irritated, and throwing aside her sulkiness, answered her aunt with bitterly insulting words. Her aunt retorted in a similar way, and they both continued quarrelling desperately until Mrs. Hogg, losing all control over herself, seized hold of Rotha and began to give her a ferocious beating.

Rotha struggled with her aunt, and succeeding in getting free, ran into the kitchen and bolted herself in. She was still there when some little time after her aunt went up to the attic to bed. Too excited to sleep, Mrs. Hogg lay in bed listening to hear the sound of any movements that might be made by her niece. She heard her after a while unlock the door of the kitchen and go from there into the sitting-room. From her eyes being no doubt partially blinded by weeping, she, it would appear, chanced to tread on the cat, for the poor brute cried out as if much hurt. She then heard Rotha making abortive efforts to speak, in order to soothe the wailing animal, but sobs choked her utterance. But after a while all

became quiet below, and Rotha seemed to have sobbed herself to sleep. And soon after, Mrs. Hogg's excitement having subsided, she fell asleep, and slept heavily until her usual time of getting up in the morning. Upon dressing and going down-stairs, she found Rotha gone. The bedclothes on the old couch in the sitting-room on which she slept were in confusion, as if she had been tossing feverishly about before getting up. She had since heard, from a woman that she knew, that Rotha was seen at the railway station, getting into a London train.

"Has she any friends or relatives in London who would be likely to take her in?" asked Arthur, after having heard the preceding particulars.

"None at all, that I knows of," answered Mrs. Hogg. "There's a harnt of hers there—a sister of mine who I ain't friends with, who is a nuss in a fever 'ospital. In course she wouldn't be likely to seek a home with her."

"No. It seems to me that most probably her intention in going to London was to seek work again at the milliner's she left at the beginning of the year on account of the state of her health."

"I expect it was; yet it's strange, that though she might be too angry with me to write to me, she hain't sent you a line, just to say she's all right, as you've been sich a friend to her. She must know you'll be hangshus about her."

As he thought what sort of friend to the missing Rotha he had lately proved himself to be, Arthur's conscience smote him terribly. To keep him in cruel suspense, he thought, she might regard as a just punishment that it might do him good to suffer. Instead of continuing the conversation with Mrs. Hogg, he sat moodily silent, staring into the fire. He felt half-inclined to believe that Rotha and he were victims of some horrid fatality. While thus brooding, an uncomfortable feeling came over him that his landlady's gipsy-looking eyes were fixed upon him. This morbid feeling grew stronger and stronger, and at length he felt disagreeably constrained to turn his head and look the old woman in the face. As his furtive glance met that from her strange black eyes, it was almost with a shudder that he recollected Rotha telling him that some poor people about Serfswell believed her aunt to have the evil eye.

"You don't think she have made away with herself?" hurriedly asked Mrs. Hogg, filled with dismal apprehensions by Arthur's sombre and frightened look.

"She could have done that here. But you are satisfied she was seen getting into a train for London?"

"I ham; but she might have made up her mind to kill herself after she got to Lunnun."

"She might; but I think she would have too great a fear of being punished in the next world to commit suicide, unless she went quite mad."

"P'raps she's bin run over," further suggested Mrs. Hogg. "The streets of Lunnun is so very dangerous."

"There are worse things may happen to us than death, Mrs. Hogg," said Arthur, and then relapsed into gloomy silence.

"As I'm no scholard," presently said Mrs. Hogg, becoming impatient at Arthur's continued silence, "I thought that p'raps you would be so kind as to write for me to the milliner, to know if Rotha have gone there: here is the address, as my poor dear sister, Rotha's mother as was, gave me." She held out a dirty-looking card towards Arthur.

He took it, and read upon it, "Madame Smith, French Milliner, Waterloo House, Broad Street, Camden Town."

"I think," said Arthur, after reflecting, "that the best course to pursue will be for me to go to London by an early train to-morrow, and inquire of Mrs. Smith if your niece has been to her. I have heard her say more than once that Mrs. Smith liked her very much, and told her that if her health got better, she would be glad to have her back."

"You're very kind, Mr. Howard, to take so much

trouble about Rotha, after she have treated you so ungrateful. In course I didn't like to ask you to go to Lunnun as you proposes, but I quite thinks it best for you so to do. But if you finds Rotha have not been to Mrs. Smith's, what do you think you'll do then?"

"It seems to me that I had then better make inquiries at the different police stations, anywhere near the line of route, between Paddington Terminus and Broad Street, Camden Town; because if I find that she has not been to Mrs. Smith's, it seems to me it will probably be that she has been taken seriously ill on her way there from the railway station. I fear, after what she has had to submit to, that is not at all unlikely to have happened. In case I may find it necessary to inquire at the police stations, I ought to be prepared to give particulars how Rotha was dressed. You, I presume, will have no difficulty in telling me that?"

"O no; at least I can tell exactly what clothes she had with her, either on, or I 'spose in a bundle, because I knows well all the few things she had, and I have well looked over what she have left behind."

"Will you please give me particulars of the things that you believe her to have taken with her?"

Mrs. Hogg at once proceeded to comply with this request, and Arthur made memoranda of her statements in his pocket notebook.

All necessary arrangements having been duly made, Arthur went up the following morning by express train to Paddington. Arrived there, he jumped into a Hansom cab and was quickly driven to Waterloo House, Broad Street, Camden Town. Madame Smith was engaged with a customer when he called, and he had to wait a long time before he could speak to her. When he did succeed in doing so, he soon found, to his disappointment, that Rotha had not applied to her for employment.

Leaving the milliner's, he obtained from the first policeman he came to the addresses of the different police-stations situated at all near the line of route between Broad Street, Camden Town, and Paddington Terminus. He then hired another Hansom, and commenced systematically to visit these police stations. After visiting two to no purpose, he learnt at one, at Paddington, that a girl such as he described had been brought in there on the morning of the day before yesterday in an unconscious state, the constables who brought her in imagining her to have been drinking. But the officer in charge of the station thinking they were mistaken, the girl was seen by the divisional surgeon. He decided that she was not intoxicated, but thought that most likely she had fainted, and that falling she had struck her head either against some iron railings or the stone pave-

ment. There was a wound on her head as if from a blow, but the doctor could not discover that she had sustained any serious injury. He found upon her, however, unmistakable symptoms that she was attacked by scarlet fever. Some medicine was administered that revived her, but she appeared to be quite idiotic. Only inarticulate sounds could be got out of her, and no name or address could be found about her or in her bundle: her name that had been written on her linen was so washed out as to be quite illegible. The police being thus unable to learn who she was, or where her home was, she was sent to the West London Fever Hospital.

Upon coming out of the police station Arthur directed the cabman to drive to the hospital just referred to, or to take him within a short distance of it, if he did not like to go close to it. He himself did not feel timid about going to the hospital, as he remembered that he had the scarlet fever when he was a boy.

But the cabman was deaf, and, misunderstanding what was said to him, drove to some hospital in the north-east part of London. Arthur, absorbed in painful thought, had not taken any notice of the streets that he passed through. The mistake was extremely vexatious, as he had been taken a very long way from the hospital he wanted to go to. His

horse, the cabman said, was now too tired to take the journey to the West London Fever Hospital ; but the best way to get there would be not by a cab, but by the North-West London Railway. The hospital was only a few minutes' walk from the Gorse Common Station on that line. To avoid delay Arthur refrained from having any altercation with the cabman ; besides he knew he had a way of speaking sometimes as if down his throat, causing people to mistake what he said to them. He settled with the cabman when he had taken him to the nearest station on the North West London line. There he fortunately just caught a train that stopped at Gorse Common.

Owing to this mistake of the cabman, when he arrived at the fever hospital it was quite dark. But the gas-lamp at the entrance to the grounds of the hospital showed the gate open, and a male visitor talking to a short, sullen-looking lodge porter and a tall, eagle-eyed nurse. On getting a view of the face of the visitor, Arthur remembered it as that of young Woods. Young Woods, he thought, was no doubt up in town to preach at the Revivalist services Rotha had spoken about, and having somehow heard that the latter was at the West London Fever Hospital, had called to inquire how she was.

The lodge porter looked inquiringly at Arthur, as if inviting him to speak. "I'll wait a minute," the

latter said, "till you have finished with this gentleman," and withdrew a few steps behind Woods, who, intent upon listening to something the nurse was saying, had not looked at him. As he thus stood, filled with vague fears, he overheard the following conversation :—

"That wicked old sister of mine always was a vile temper. I was not at all unprepared to hear that one of these days she had killed the poor girl; but I was astonished to hear of such cowardly behaviour from that gentleman lodger of hers. One naturally expects that only low roughs will brutally ill-treat *our* sex."

"He must be a great blackguard, and deserves to be severely punished. My father went to speak about the matter to a solicitor to-day."

"And what did the solicitor say?"

"I don't know—my father had not returned when I left Reading. But before he went he said that he intended to write to you. Your niece, I suppose, has not told you anything fresh than what you mentioned in your letter to my mother about the cruel treatment she has been subjected to?"

"Nothing while in her right mind; but she was delirious yesterday afternoon, and it made the blood of every one who heard her run cold to hear the things she said about that lodger-fellow at my sister's."

"I don't call such a fellow as him a man," said the lodge porter.

"He's indeed unworthy of the name," said Woods.

"A tiger is an angel to him," said the nurse.

"He's a frightful example of what drink will make of a man. Well indeed has it been said of strong drink that it is the masterpiece of Satan. I am very glad to hear the poor sufferer is doing as well as could be expected. But I must not stay a minute longer, as I have an appointment to keep."

The usual parting salutations having been exchanged between the three speakers, Woods hurried away, taking no notice of Arthur.

The latter individual stood looking away from the hospital, almost paralysed with terror and astonishment. It seemed to him too horribly incredible to be possible that *he* should be that wretched man, the story of whose cruel treatment of a feeble fellow-creature was exciting indignation and horror amongst the sufferers in a London hospital—that *he* could be that guilty creature who, through legal proceedings being taken, was menaced with the publication by the press of the details of his mad iniquity, and of so being made an object of loathing to the world.

"Now, sir, what's *your* business?" called out the lodge porter to him.

With the courage of desperation, Arthur turned

towards the speaker. The light of the gas-lamp falling upon his face, showed it to be so terribly agitated that the porter, and also the nurse, who had remained out of curiosity, started with surprise. They exchanged afterwards significant looks. A convulsive trembling of the muscles of the mouth, notwithstanding he made great efforts to subdue it, prevented Arthur from speaking. But the silent muscular language of his whole features told of overwhelming guilty alarm. Guilty alarm, too, that the nurse and porter could not help seeing the conversation just narrated had inspired, for they had both noticed his face when he first arrived, and saw in it only that of a passively dejected man.

"You are interested, I presume," said the nurse, "in the case of the poor young creature we have just been talking about?"

"Ye-er-es," Arthur succeeded in saying.

"If that is a satisfaction to you to know, I can tell you she stands a very fair chance of recovery, notwithstanding the fever and cruel treatment she's suffering from," continued the nurse, fixing her eagle eyes upon Arthur as if reading his very soul.

At her severe and scrutinising glance he abjectly cast his eyes upon the ground, like some dastardly criminal about to hear his sentence from the judge.

Seeing this, the eagle-eyed nurse decided at once

to know whether her suspicion as to who it was she was talking to was correct. Like a bird of prey, she swooped down upon her trembling victim with the words, "You, if I am not mistaken, are the *gentleman* of whom we have been speaking?"

Arthur hung down his head in shame, and, by his silence, admitted that she was addressing that guilty man.

"You ought to be severely punished, as a warning to others," said the nurse, sternly.

Having at length gained some control over his organs of speech, Arthur stammered out, "I am anxious, I assure you, to do all in my power to atone for my misconduct. I am willing to marry your niece when she gets well."

"Marry her! A nice fate for the poor girl, to be married to a wretched drunkard, and live in daily dread of being kicked or beaten out of her life by him when mad drunk! Marry her, indeed!" The nurse turned up her nose as if there was an offensive cess-pool beneath it.

The utter contempt that he felt for himself at that humiliating moment caused Arthur's face also to assume an expression of disgust. "I can quite understand that she looks upon me with dislike and contempt," he said; "and if what I have proposed is inadmissible, I would suggest instead that I should

settle a sum of money upon her, sufficient to bring her in an annuity that would keep her from want for the rest of her life."

The nurse manifestly thought this a proposition not to be scornfully rejected, but she only said severely, "The time is not yet come when any arrangement can be made in the matter ; my niece's recovery is the first thing to be thought of ; when she is better, her wishes will be ascertained by myself and Mr. Woods. I must leave you now ; I have already been too long away from my ward." So saying, the nurse hastened away from the gate, which the impatient porter immediately shut.

The manner in which his last proposition had been received greatly mitigated the intense fear with which Arthur had been inspired by that portion of the conversation between the nurse and Woods that he had overheard. There was, it appeared to him, at least a possibility that by the sacrifice of a considerable sum of money he might ultimately escape from the great trouble that he had madly brought upon himself. But, as the nurse had very reasonably said, while her niece was so ill was not the time for any arrangement to be made in the matter. Until she got better he must submit to being kept in a state of painful suspense.

Such were Arthur's reflections as he walked to-

wards a small roadside inn that he espied a short distance from the hospital. Taking a glass of pale ale there, he inquired for the nearest station on the Great Western, and was informed it was that of West Drayton. He had to walk for more than a mile before he could get a cab, and when he reached West Drayton Station he learnt that a Reading train had just gone. For the next train he had to wait two weary hours.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. HOGG IS OVERCOME BY HER FEELINGS.

It was half-past ten o'clock at night before Arthur, after his visit to London in search of Rotha, reached Daisy Cottage. The front door was bolted, and he had to knock long and loudly at it before Mrs. Hogg let him in.

"I thought that you had gone to bed, Mrs. Hogg," he said, when she did at last open the door, dressed as she usually was of an evening.

"No, but I wash ashleep," she answered in a manner that showed she was tipsy. "When it shtruk ten and you hadn't come back, I felt sho nervous and low-spheretted that I made sho bold ash to take a glash of your gin, Mishter Howard. I thought you wouldn't mind—you wash sho kind at Chrishmash ash to shay you bought it prinshipally for me—and it rather got into my head, and made me sho drowsy that I couldn't keep my eyesh open. Well, did you find Rotha had gone to Mishiss Smishe's?"

"No; she's in the West London Fever Hospital,

where your sister is nurse. She has got the scarlet fever. I saw your sister, and she says Rotha is likely to recover, notwithstanding the fever she's got and the bad treatment she's had."

"Sho Rotha'sh got the shearlet fever, has she? Well, I notished that she didn't sheem herself at all the night her and me had our quarrel, but I didn't think it wash anything sherioush. And how come she, pray, to get into the hoshpital where my shister ish?"

Arthur then told Mrs. Hogg the particulars as to how her niece came to be taken there.

"It'sh a great relief to my feelingsh to find thingsh ish no wussh," said Mrs. Hogg. "But before you talk any more, come upstairsh, Mishter Howard, into your own room, there'sh a nyshe fire there. I wash ashleep by it when you knocked. I let my fire out about nine o'clock becaushe I thought it waishte to keep two firesh a-burning longer."

Arthur went upstairs into his sitting-room, and the inebriated old woman blundered up after him with the candle. Evidences of a child having been recently in the room caught his eye as he entered. On the old Pembroke table that did duty as a centre table were his playing cards, a portion of them lying evidently as they had fallen, after having been built into a house. And near them was one of those gutta-percha miniature faces that when squeezed or pulled

make all sorts of strange grimaces. Lying by this face, the peep-hole in a line with its eyes, was a kaleidoscope. A penny edition of "Jack and Jill" illustrated, and a damaged doll leaking sawdust lay upon the old sofa-bedstead opposite the window. The kaleidoscope and the doll Arthur recognised as gifts of his own to the youngest daughter of his landlady's married sister—a chubby, blue-eyed little girl, who not unfrequently came to Daisy Cottage, and who was rather a favourite with Arthur. Her demonstrative display of ignorance of the fact that "man was made to mourn" amused him: always in rude health, she was playful as a kitten.

"You have had your little niece here to keep you company, I suppose?" said Arthur.

"Yesh," replied Mrs. Hogg; "my shister hash brought her to shtay with me ash I wash sho lone-shome. I did not take her up to bed till nearly ten o'clock, and when I came down after she had gone to shleep I felt sho low-spheretted I thought I had better have a drop of gin. Shoon arter that I fell ashleep myshelf; that'sh how I haven't cleared up her toysh, but I'll do sho at onesh."

"No, never mind about doing that just at present, Mrs. Hogg. Take a seat, and I will tell you a little more about what I have been doing to-day," said Arthur, pointing to a chair by the side of the fire.

Mrs. Hogg sat down in the chair indicated, and Arthur seated himself by the fire, facing her. He then proceeded to give her such further information as to his day's doings as he thought advisable.

When he had finished his narration, Mrs. Hogg remarked that, after all, all had happened for the best. If Rotha had been laid up with the scarlet fever at Daisy Cottage, she couldn't have been nursed, and taken care of as she would be by her aunt at the hospital. And it would have been a great calamity for a poor widow letting lodgings to have had such a dreadful infectious disease in her house. Mr. Howard would then no doubt have left her, and of course she could not have taken any other lodger for a long while. She concluded by saying, in a lowered tone of voice to give her words greater solemnity, "The waysh of Providenshe ish very myshterioush, Mishter Howard." She then looked towards Arthur, expecting him also to express an opinion on the ways of Providence.

But he sat looking broodingly into the fire, and remained silent.

"I shaid the waysh of Providenshe ish very mysh-terioush, Mishter Howard," repeated Mrs. Hogg in a much shriller tone than before.

"Very," replied Arthur, dryly.

"I wash wrong, I know, Mishter Howard, in giving

way to my temper ash I did, but I'm shure I've bin punished enough for doing sho. You don't know what dreadful feelings I've had shince Rotha'sh bin gone. *There*—when I comed down to-night after putting my little neishe to bed, I wash that hangshus that I almosht felt tempted to do shomething to myshelf—I couldn't help my feelingsh, Mishter Howard."

"It would be a good job if we had no feelings," said Arthur, "seeing what a world we live in."

"Sho it would, Mr. Howard; sho it would."

There was a pause in their conversation. Arthur's eye chanced to fall on the gutta-percha face lying at his right hand on the table. It represented the face of a jester with cap and bells. Taking it up and holding it between his thumb and fingers, so that both of them could see it, Arthur said to Mrs. Hogg—

"If it were not for our troublesome, over-sensitive feelings, instead of pulling long faces at life, we should wear expanded features like this gutta-percha face; life would seem a capital comedy. Once there did live a man who couldn't have been troubled with ordinary feelings, for human life under all circumstances struck him as purely comical—he laughed at everything."

"What a sthory!"

"It's a story that history tells, not I; and the

man of whom it is told was called the laughing philosopher. He lived in Greece a long time ago, and his name——” Arthur hesitated in doubt about the name. A sudden spasm caused him involuntarily so sharply to pinch the soft toy face as to extravagantly distort it. Its laughing expression was changed suddenly to that of a human face in the convulsions of death, or at least seemed to be so to Arthur’s morbidly imaginative mind. Hurriedly finishing his last sentence, and making a strange mistake, he said, “his name was *Heraclitus*.” He flung down the fool’s face upon the table, where it lay, looking up with its accustomed grin.

“You don’t feel hill, I ’ope, shir?” inquired Mrs. Hogg.

“No, I only had a passing spasm; it is nearly gone already. I have scarcely had any solid food since I left this morning; perhaps that’s the cause of it. I think I had better take a little bit of bread-and-cheese before I go to bed.”

“Would you like shome eggsh-and-bacon better? I could cook ’em on your fire.”

“No, thank you; a little bread-and-cheese is all I want. Just bring it on a tray; don’t trouble to lay a cloth.”

The old woman went stumbling out of the room to get her lodger’s supper, forgetting to close the door

after her. Arthur went up to it and slammed it to violently, being miserably out of temper. The instant he had done so a *thud* and a sound as of breaking glass caused him to look towards the old sofa-bedstead, and to discover that his engraving of Poussin's "Bacchanalian Dance" had fallen, and that the glass over it was broken. He remembered then having noticed a day or two before, just as he was going out, that the nail to which the picture was hung appeared to be giving way from the crumbling plaster of the old wall, and that he intended when he came in to refix the nail in a sounder place, but that instead of doing this he had quite forgotten all about it. The vibration made by slamming to the door had been sufficient to quite shake out the nail from the wall, and so the picture had of course immediately fallen. Arthur took it up and pushed it in an angry and disgusted mood out of his sight under the old sofa-bedstead. The spirit that the picture seemed to breathe, in the mood he was in, was revolting to him. The heedless gaiety of the "reeling faun," and all pleasures directly arising from abandonment to the mere "rhythmic palpitations of the flesh," were now to him—to make use of a hackneyed but expressive metaphor—but as mocking apples of the Dead Sea, having a seducingly tempting appearance, but capable only of filling the parched and hungering soul with choking dust.

The old woman was an unreasonably long time gone. To relieve the tedium of waiting, and to draw off by something external his attention from his own mental state, Arthur took up the kaleidoscope and looked into it, turning it round slowly as he did so. The varied succession of combinations of beautiful forms and colours it displayed somewhat amused him, until both his eyes became rather weary, when the aching of his mind was again obtruded prominently upon his consciousness. He then sought distraction in thinking fancifully about what had ceased to give him pleasure in doing. He imaginatively constituted the pieces of coloured glass in the kaleidoscope representatives of the molecules of matter. The revolving motion that he gave the toy he thought of as the energy in Nature that groups molecules into diamonds, roses, jelly-fishes, men, and harmonious combinations without end. His own eye, contemplating the transformations of the kaleidoscope, he grandly compared to the scientific intellect discerning the elemental constitution and hidden relations of material things. "By this scientific intellect," so ran his thoughts, "the molecules of matter, though incessantly changing their respective positions to one another, are seen ever to exhibit combinations admirably symmetrical. Creatures that are simply loathsome to the feelings are seen by it as marvels of

constructive adaptation, and even cancer cells to be deposited according to harmoniously beautiful laws. If human minds were *but* intellects, or rather intellects with feelings given to them merely as dutiful slaves, Nature in them would have developed eyes fit to look upon and appreciate her own beauty. But, often blinded with tears, can her delicately complex eyes then adequately fulfil their functions? Or, inflamed after excess of weeping, must not light so pain them that they are driven to seek ease in darkness? Clear dry eyes are needed to look properly upon Nature; human minds feel too intensely to see clearly. Absorbing feelings are but stumbling-blocks in the way of those whose vocation is ever to aspire daringly to know. How is it, then, that in a universe, the perfection of whose adaptations is marvellous, the creatures specially evolved by Nature to know herself are not better adapted to their work? She has carefully evolved from them — through, says Mr. Darwin, their female ancestor's passion for the nude — the hairy skin of the beast, and given them bodies as naked as those of the statues of the Apollo Belvidere and the Venus de' Medici: why has she not also developed their minds into equally naked intellects? Why has she inconsistently evolved in their females a passion for wrapping up intellect in burdensome swaddling-clothes and miserably arresting

its development? She will answer these questions perhaps in future ages: meanwhile her conduct is tormentingly perplexing.

“It is not merely that man’s mind is distracted from purely intellectual work by the presence of monstrous distortions of the gross feelings of the beast, but, waging active war with these, it has also the moral feelings of the — what? *Is* there any other creature in the universe has moral feelings like man? If so, it is to be hoped it is not conditioned—mockingly conditioned—as he is. Figuratively, he may be compared to an ill-fated golden eagle, who, with a wing broken by a shot, has fallen in a swamp. Around it swarms of joyous creatures sport in and over the green slime where *it* flounders and splashes but to feel that it *ought* to be soaring towards the sun. I, like the maimed bird, am distressed by a sense of obligation to act in a way I find beyond my power. My intellect may plainly show me that, in yielding to some overmastering passion, I acted but as a piece of steel irresistibly attracted by a magnet; but my moral nature ignores the explanation. Without showing me that I *could* have acted otherwise, it affirms, with a tormenting persistency, that I *ought* to have done so. Like an infallible pope, it replies to my intellectual argumentation by anathemas. And though intellect, in its progress, has driven an external pope from his

throne, the moral pope, enthroned within man, defies intellect to rob it of its sovereignty. The tortures of the inquisition of this pope of the mind go on as of yore. Pitilessly are wretched men still condemned by it to the horrors of remorse—driven by it in their anguish to cry out, like him of old, ‘ My punishment is greater than I can bear ! ’ ”

Laying down the kaleidoscope and getting up from his chair, Arthur then walked restlessly about the room. At length his dilatory, snuffy old landlady appeared with his supper.

“ I thought you had gone to sleep below,” grumbled Arthur, as he pulled out the cork of a bottle of Scotch ale that he had taken from the cupboard to wash down his bread-and-cheese with.

“ You thought right, shir, for I jusht took a sheat—my old legsh did ache sho—to trim the loaf into a fit shtate to bring to a shentleman, when I musht have dozhed off; for I’ve jusht now woke up, with my head lying on the kitchen table.”

“ Well, ‘ better late than never,’ ” said Arthur, as he sat down to the table.

He ate and drank greedily. Feeling himself cut off from all mental comfort, he snatched with eager desperation at the opportunity of obtaining a little animal gratification. Mrs. Hogg resumed her former seat, waiting to see if Arthur had anything more to

say to her; but finding that he ate his supper in silence, and took no notice of her, she after a while said to him—

“If there isn’t anything more I can do for you, I think I will wish you good-night, Mishter Howard.”

“All right, Mrs. Hogg; I won’t trouble you for anything more to-night.”

The old woman rose from her chair, and peered up at the clock that hung against the wall over the chimney-glass. This was an old-fashioned cuckoo clock, that had been so long in the family of Arthur’s mother, that to her he used jokingly to speak of it as an heirloom.

“Deary me! shurely your clock can’t be right, Mishter Howard?” said Mrs. Hogg, in surprise.

“Quite right by my watch,” answered Arthur, after looking at his watch, “and I’m pretty sure that’s right. The old year hasn’t much longer to live.” It was the last day of the year 187—.

“Why, I hadn’t no idea it whas sho late; it’s jusht upon the shtroke of twelve. I’ll jusht shtay and shee the cuckoo come out, and, for the lasht time thish year, cry ——” The tipsy old woman here made a ludicrous attempt to imitate the cuckoo’s song. “I don’t s’phose,” she then went on babbling, “we shall be able to ’ear the Sherfshwell bellsh ring the old year out and the new year in. We moshly ’ear ’em ring

merrily, but the wind to-night blowsh sho shtrongly the wrong way. It'sh a pity you won't be able to 'ear 'em — they shound sho 'eavenly in the quiet of the night."

"Oh, don't trouble yourself on that account, Mrs. Hogg. I'm in no state of mind to listen to church bells ringing merrily. I feel very much in the humour to curse the old year out," he said, bitterly. His tongue, as if possessed by a devil, itched to curse something.

"Pray don't do that, shur—such wickednessh might bring down a shudgement of the Almighty upon thish houshe."

It was with some pleasure—malignant pleasure—that Arthur noticed his old landlady seemed frightened at the words he had last spoken. The iron heel of Fate fell crushingly upon him, gave him so humiliating a sense of his own impotence, that to be made conscious of still possessing power even of the most paltry kind was gratifying to him. It was something to find that, if he willed to do so, he was able, by a few words of his, momentarily to terrify an ignorant old woman. Momentarily—for he knew Mrs. Hogg did not trouble herself much about the anger of the Almighty when she was sober, and that alcoholic stimulation caused her religion to manifest itself as heat does writing in invisible ink. Mockingly he replied to her remonstrance by saying—

"Your pious feelings shall be respected, Mrs. Hogg. To avoid bringing down a judgment on this house, I'll anathematise 187 — with my head out of window." He made a movement towards the window.

"No, shir, you sha'n't!" cried Mrs. Hogg, clutching hold of him.

"Sha'n't I?" rejoined Arthur, irritated. "Then I *shall* do it without putting my head out of window. And hearing from the murmuring vibration inside the clock that it was on the eve of striking twelve, he cried out, staring at the little door where the cuckoo was to appear, "Here goes! May the wretched year that's passing away be ——"

The claw-like hand of the withered old woman at that instant grasped his lips with the frantic energy of superstitious fear, and stopped his utterance. He wrenched her hand away from his mouth, and, spitefully grasping it as in a bony vice with his own skeleton-like hand, fixed his eyes in fury upon her. She fell heavily towards him, and would have sunk to the ground had he not thrown his arms round her as he staggered backwards. "The old beast is dead drunk," he muttered, imagining the gin that she had taken was only beginning to produce its full effect upon her. "I must get a lock put on that cupboard," he thought; "it's a precious lot more of my gin than a glassful that she has stolen." He dragged her to the old sofa-

bedstead, and placed her leaning in the corner at the nearest end of it.

The cuckoo came forth from the clock and uttered its monotonous song as the old year died ; but Mrs. Hogg did not hear it—she had done with “cuckoo cries.” Her jaw dropped, and told Arthur to his alarm that she would steal his gin no more : too literally she was *dead* drunk.

Arthur immediately understood what had happened. Mrs. Hogg, he was aware, had had for years an affection of the valves of her heart. The excitement and anxiety connected with her quarrel with Rotha, and with the latter’s flight, had so perniciously influenced her diseased heart, that the little fright that he had given her had been sufficient to cause it to cease to beat.

He stood still for a moment, quietly thinking who was the nearest doctor for him to run to. The wind lulled, and, softened by distance, there then fell upon his ears the sounds of a merry welcome to the new year pealing forth from the bells in the old Norman tower of Serfswell Church.

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